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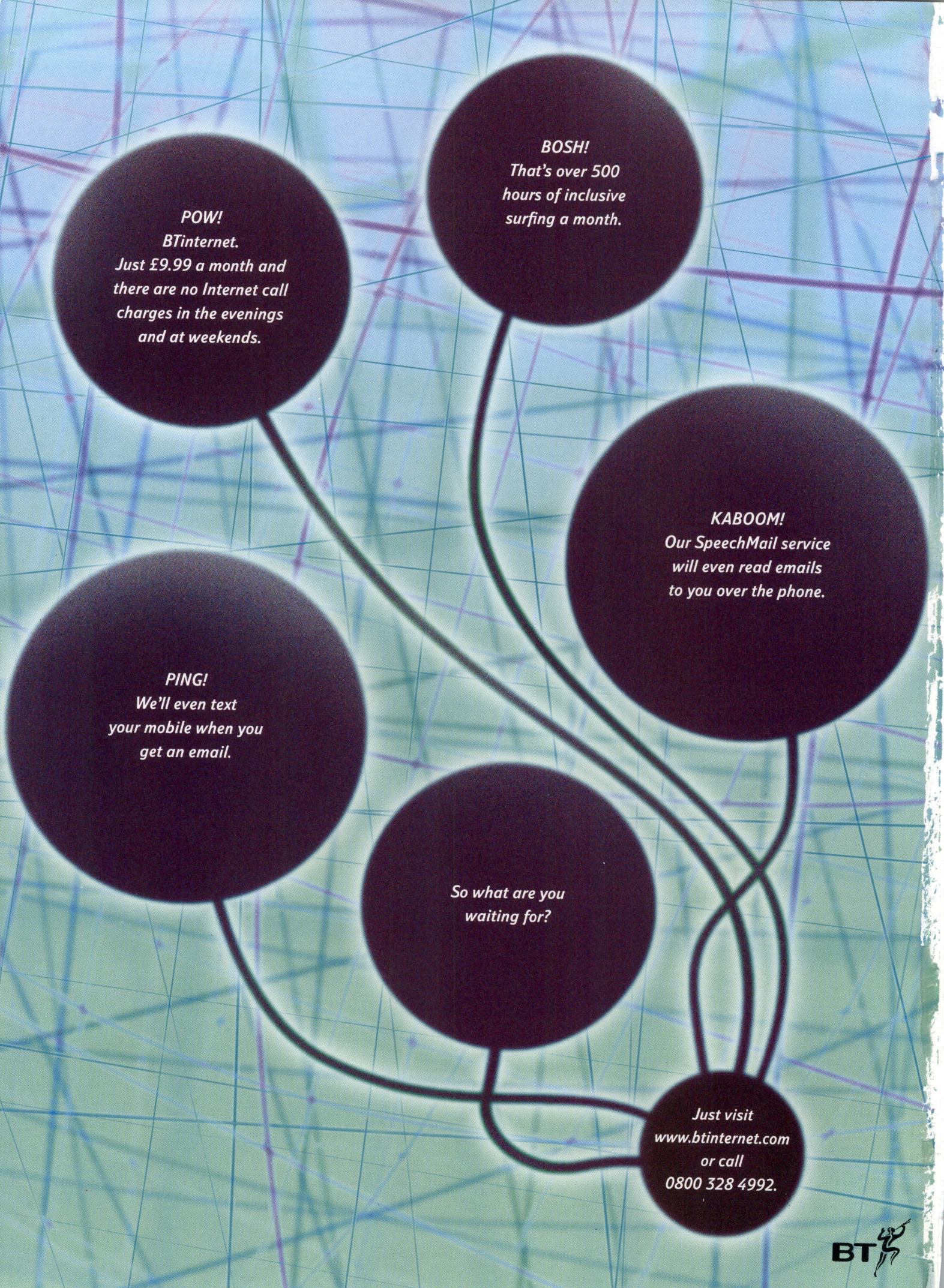

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: JEAN BAPTISTE MONDINO

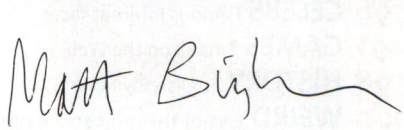
A monthly fee covers all calls to the Internet – allegedly

There's something comforting about having a routine. The morning ritual of shower, flossing, followed by delicious grapefruit segments. Sunday lunchtimes spent with the papers in the pub. And there's the Web site click-around, those half-a-dozen favourites you – and millions of others – check out every time you fire up a browser.

Now there's nothing wrong with the MSNs and the BBCs of this world. Fine Web sites one and all, they've been feted many times in the pages of this magazine. But it's 2001, for pity's sake, so out with the old and in with the new – which is why we want to alert you to a whole exciting world of alternatives to those 'cosy slipper' sites you ease your weary feet into every day. We've rounded up a whole mess of these unsung heroes, from alternative news providers to the most exciting entertainment channels you'll want to keep your eyes on in the next 12 months, starting on page 38.

That other great New Year resolution is, of course, to get fitter. Which is why there's a tracksuit hidden in your wardrobe, covered in a layer of dust carbon-dated back to January 2, 2000. But for the investment of 10 minutes of your time every day, plus a few simple adjustments to your working environment, you could stave off the evils of RSI, back pain and all the other potentially disastrous ailments risked by the average Web addict. Find out how on page 50.

Happy surfing!



Matthew Bingham, **Editor**
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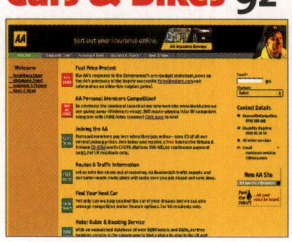

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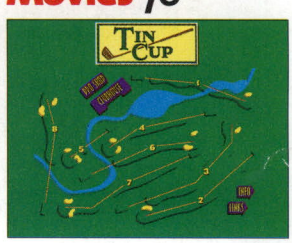

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ALERT

It's official: email can get you sacked

Dismissals for dodgy messages upheld in landmark case

An industrial tribunal has upheld the decision to sack two workers for sending personal emails. This is the first time a sacking for this offence had been legally challenged, and the landmark decision has implications for every case that follows.

David Pennington and Rupert Beverley were made redundant after sending emails to 40 staff at Huddersfield-based Holset Engineering. The mails ranged from the usual sexually explicit cartoons and jokes to a Shockwave frog-in-a-blender animation. Both men claimed they didn't know what they had done was an offence within the company.

The mails ranged from explicit cartoons to a frog in a blender

Hammond Suddards Edge, the law firm acting for Holset Engineering, said that if companies have clear email policies, staff must be aware of what they can and cannot do.

Within a week of the ruling, Cable & Wireless fired six workers at its Birmingham office for alleged 'misuse' of email. C&W wouldn't reveal the details but stressed their clear policy on 'defamatory, discriminatory, offensive or obscene material', and that 'regular reminders are issued to this effect'.

It's becoming clear that some companies are growing intolerant of dodgy emails, either because of the wasted time involved or the possibility of complaints and libel actions (the mails you send represent your company).

Bosses may be acting while they're still allowed to. This spring, the Data Protection Commission's code of practice comes into force, restricting surveillance in the workplace; companies breaking the code face heavy fines.

It's a different matter if it's in the national interest, however, as the Government's Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIP) bill has shown. A leaked memo reveals the Government plans to strengthen the RIP bill by forcing ISPs and telecom companies to store details of phone calls, Web page impressions and emails for seven years – that ancient email could come back to haunt you.

'...and we didn't think the kitten in the shredder was funny, either'

Shockwave frog-in-a-blender: not a good way to advance your career

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: KOBAL, NEWSMAKERS, LIAISON, ONLINE USA

GOOD NEWS

DIAL G FOR GIRLFRIEND

Bandai, the Japanese company which brought us that loveable electronic pet, the Tamagotchi, is using mobile phones to go one step further. It has invented a virtual girlfriend.

Only available via iMode, Japan's all-singing, all-dancing answer to WAP, an astonishing 30,000 men have already signed up for Love by Mail, for which they pay 300 yen (£2) a month.

Shy bachelors can choose to correspond with one of a variety of ladies, including a schoolteacher and a flight attendant. In reality, of course, they're paying out to get

Virtual girlfriend: knows her place

messaged by a computer program.

The 'courtship' plays itself out over two or three months, during which time the men try to tease intimate secrets out of their electronic partners. It's not easy; the virtual ladies are fickle and any man who starts blathering on about football when he should be promising to pick up a takeaway and a box of Roses on the way home could find himself unceremoniously dumped. Just like in real life, then...

Belching 'abracadabra' always seemed to impress the ladies

KNOWHOW

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT...?

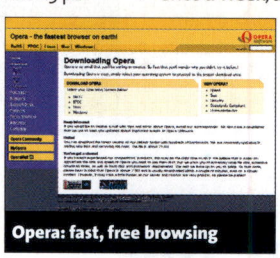
No.19: Opera

What are we talking here? La Traviata, Carmen...?

Don't talk daft. Opera is a Web browser, an alternative to Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator.

Is it popular?

At the moment it only has 1.5 per cent of the market. But all those users paid $39 (£27) to download it – not bad when you consider that its two biggest rivals are free.



Opera: fast, free browsing

Are these people mad?

Far from it. Opera has a well-deserved reputation for being a faster way of getting around the Web, as it's cut out the bells and whistles that come as standard with IE5 and Navigator. It also takes up a lot less space on your hard drive.

Are you on commission?

Not any more. Opera's makers have just announced that the latest version, 5.0, will be available as a free download (***www.opera.com/download***). It will also be given away on CDs in computer magazines.

$39 times 1.5 million is a lot of money. How are they going to make up for losing all that revenue?

If you use the freeware version, once a week, a single banner advert is downloaded to the browser and displayed within it. If you don't want the banner ad, you can still pay the $39 fee for an ad-free version.

So what's missing from this 'streamlined' browser?

Opera 5.0 supports 128bit encryption, TLS 1.0, SSL 2 and 3, CSS1 and CSS2, XML, HTML 4.01, HTTP 1.1, ECMAScript, JavaScript 1.3, and includes experimental upport for DOM and WAP/ WML.

Eh?

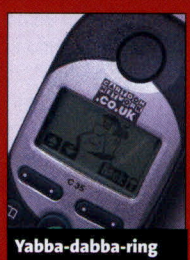
In short, it does everything your regular browser already does. See ***www.webopedia.com*** or ***www.whatis.com*** for more details.

WAP Shots What's new in the wonderful world of WAP

Ever sat on a train wondering whether your ideal domain name is available? Wonder no more with Just Domains, which has now been WAPped at wap.justdomains.com

Cartoon characters are coming to take over your phone, desktop-style. Cartoon Network (*www.cartoonnetwork.co.uk*) is joining forces with Mviva (*www.mviva.com*) to provide games, SMS picture messaging and a range of theme-tune ring phones, including the *Flintstones*.

Also planning to take over your mobile is French company Kiwee. The site attracted half a million active subscribers in its first year with its ringtones, logos, screensavers, chat, lottery and games. Check it out at *uk.kiwee.com*.

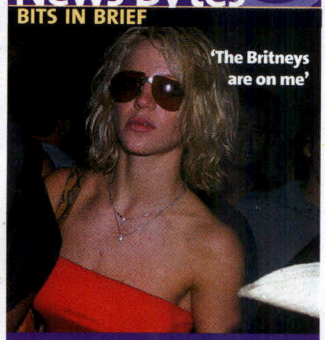


Yabba-dabba-ring

Monster Japanese operator NTT DoCoMo has its eyes on America with the purchase of a 16 percent stake in AT&T's mobile phone unit.

News Bytes

BITS IN BRIEF



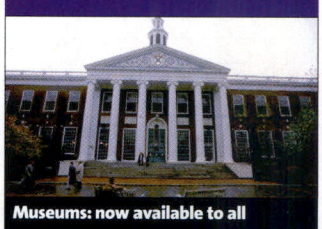
'The Britneys are on me'

GET THE BRITS IN

Music365 (*www.music365.com*) has created a new language for the pop generation: Popney Rhyming Slang, typified by such oddities as Sharleen Spiteri (hairy) and Britney Spears (beers). 'The beautiful thing about Popney Rhyming Slang,' says Music365 editor Paul Elliot, 'is that everyone gets it.' So, stop being such a Slim Shady and get Popneying.

CLICK TO KICK

Desktop Lawyer (*www.desktop lawyer.net*), whose online divorce kits helped over six percent of discontented couples in England and Wales untie the knot last year, has an even quicker way to say 'sayonara'. A link-up with cable company ntl means twosomes will now be able to go solo with a click of the remote control;which, of course, may well have been the source of the problems in the first place.



Museums: now available to all

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has released its approved list of seven new top-level domain names (TLDs). So now, in addition to .net or .com, you can register your domain name with .info, .name, .aero, .biz, .coop, .museum or .pro. (*www.icann.org/tlds*)

PLEASE TEASE ME

The maker of the Rubik's Cube has teamed up with mobile phone portal iobox to bring free brain-teasers and notable quotes to mobiles. SMS-free communicators can receive a daily dose of 'stimulating, refreshing' head-scratchers by signing up at *www.iobox.com*.

AWARDS

Radiohead prove to be doubly OK for computers

Inaugural Online Music Awards honour Oxford's finest with a brace of gongs

Gail: enjoys a pen up the nose

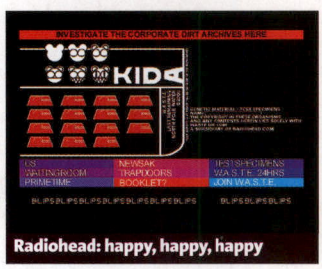
Radiohead's Internet-based promotion of their *Kid A* album and tour reaped rewards when the Oxford quintet picked up two awards at the inaugural UK Online Music Awards.

The chirpy chappies did little magazine promotion for the album, which went straight to No.1 on both sides of the Atlantic, but used a typically well thought-out Web site to release information and Webcast gigs. The approach won them both the Best Alternative Artist Web site and the Music Web site of the Year gongs.

Thom and the boys weren't around to pick up their award from host Gail Porter, but the list of celebs was headed by fellow Oxfordian Mickey Quinn. The Supergrass bassist apologised for being 'the least famous member of the group' as he picked up the band's award for Best Rock Artist Web site.

Also on stage were tuneful popsters Toploader, collecting the Best Pop Artist Web site award – though as lead singer Joe Washburn candidly admitted, 'This is the first thing we've ever won and we've had f*** all to do with it'.

Napster received recognition for its groundbreaking software with the Online Pioneer Award, and there was plenty to celebrate for Eminem. His official site collected the Best International Artist Web site gong, and fan site Eminem World (**www.eminemworld.com**) was shortlisted for the People's Choice award. In the event, that went to the official site of the stylistically somewhat different A1.



Radiohead: happy, happy, happy

AND THE WINNER IS...

Best Pop Artist Web site
Toploader (*www.toploader.com*)
Best Rock Artist Web site
Supergrass, Children of the Monkey Basket (*www.supergrass.com*)
Best Dance Artist Web site
Deejay Punk-Roc (*www.deejaypunk-roc.co.uk*)
Best Alternative Artist Web site Radiohead (*www.radiohead.com*)
Best International Artist Web site Eminem (*www.eminem.com*)
Best A&R Web site
Peoplesound (*www.peoplesound.com*)
Best Label Web site
Inc-redible (*www.inc-redible.com*)
Best Company Web site
BBC Radio 1 Online (*www.bbc.co.uk/radio1*)
Best Online Promotional Campaign Fat Les, 'Turn your mobiles on for England' (*www.fatles2000.com*)
Best E-flyer
Sisqo, Twang a thong (*www.unleashthedragon.co.uk*)
People's Choice Award for Best Music Web site
A1 Official Site (*www.a1-online.com*)
Best Online Music Event
Paul McCartney at the Cavern
Online Pioneer Award
Napster (*www.napster.com*)
Music Web site of the Year
Radiohead (*www.radiohead.com*)

WEBCAM

Net users hooked on 'Big Brother' in a fishtank

Norwegians vote out fish one by one. Are they taking the piscine?

Big Brother may have been compared to living life in a goldfish bowl, but a Web site in Norway has taken this to its obvious if somewhat literal conclusion.

ABC Startsiden (**www.startsiden.no/tanken/int**) plucked five fish from obscurity and put them on show in a tank packed with Webcams.

Each week the fish with the most online votes is ejected from the tank. However, animal rights campaigners can relax, as there is a losers' tank for them to go into and all the fish will be reunited in an after-show party in the same bowl.

Startsiden: possibly too interesting for the Belgians

The first fish to be ousted from the tank was 'nasty' Oddvar, who turned out to be far worse than our own human Nasty Nick, as he kept physically attacking the other fish.

As with the human contestants in the reality TV show, each fish has its own homepage, detailing its personality and preferences.

The winner was due to be announced shortly after *the net* went to press, but it's a fair bet that the Norwedgians' fishy favourite won't end up getting a record deal or a bumper payout.

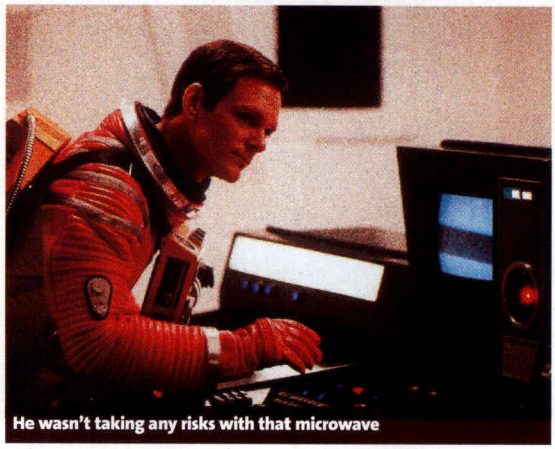
The contestants:

Janya *(Leopard Sailfin): Shy and not very active*
Pal *(Ropefish): Always on the move*
Wanda *(Angelfish): Beautiful but a little dull*
Klaus *(Goldfish): Flighty*
Oddvar *(Labyrinth fish): Aggressive*

'Hello, is that the Samaritans?'

'Open the pod bay doors, Arthur'

Reclusive sci-fi maestro plans to build real-life HAL 9000 computer



He wasn't taking any risks with that microwave

If life was like the movies, by now we should be living on the moon, sending manned missions to Jupiter and holding conversations with our computers. That was what Arthur C Clarke thought we'd be doing when he wrote *2001: A Space Odyssey* more than 30 years ago. But now, if he has anything to do with it, at least one of Arthur's predictions is set to come true.

The sci-fi guru has unveiled plans for the Clarke 1GHz Omnicomputer: the HAL 9000 of personal computing, able to handle speech recognition and, of course, lip-reading. Clarke is said to have teamed up with British computing entrepreneur Joseph de Saram to make the machine, which will retail for under £2,000 and be smart enough to repair itself – and even become 'conscious'.

Whether, like poor old HAL, the Omnicomputer will turn into a homicidal paranoiac and set the fridge-freezer to '11' remains to be seen, not least because de Saram was allegedly forced to flee the UK last month to escape debts totalling £1m. That, allied with the complete lack of technical information on the ground-breaking machine, has led one expert to describe the proposed computer as 'more like a paperweight'.

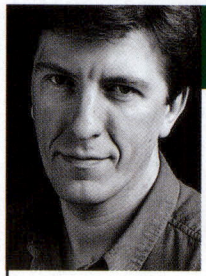
READER OFFER

Fill up for less

Stuffed yourself full of junk over Christmas? You can make yourself feel a whole lot better by ordering a cupboard of lovely organic food – and your mates at *the net* magazine will even get you a fiver off.

Pop to The Organic Shop at *www.the organic shop.co.uk* and you'll see a cavalcade of tasty fruit, veg, meat, wine and dairy products all made without recourse to nasty chemicals and delivered promptly to your door for a delicious, healthy meal.

When you've made your decision as to which tasty goods to order, click the on-screen voucher and enter the code 'thenet1'. Five pounds will come tumbling off your bill. And if you think we're being too nice to you, all inexpensively-acquired biscuits are welcome to the usual address.



MARK PAYTON
FROM WHERE I SIT

Just who is turning off the Internet?

A recent survey revealed that millions of American youngsters now count themselves as 'ex-Internet users'. The country that drove the Net to its current heights is shutting down, and its youth has its finger on the switch. Why? No doubt unreliable PCs, snail-slow 56K modems and unstable software have played their part. But the completed questionnaires include a fair smattering of complaints about the 'commercialisation' of the medium.

How quaint, you may be thinking. What did these poor, naive souls think the Internet would become? A commune in which every pseud with basic HTML skills and a modem gets to spout on a global scale about his or her latest insecurity or half-baked political notion?

But think on: compare the cyberspace of five years ago with now. Then, a few frontiersmen touting innovative commercial services, surrounded by a sea of hardcore Net enthusiasts building sites...well, because they *could*. Now? Cyber-stores have their own stock market, and even the most obscure home page has a banner ad and pop-up windows. And while there are still some corporations yet to secure their own URL, typing IBM into a keyword search now takes you straight to ***www.ibm.com*** (try it with Whitehouse – then again, don't... at least not with the kids around).

Youngsters: always angry

Elsewhere, the global trade community is attempting to get its wired adversary under control (remember that Internet regulation is one of the World Trade Organisation's primary roles). With that in mind, you can begin to understand why naturally rebellious youth is bored and frustrated with the sanitisation of The Great Equaliser. Who wants a Netscape Web browser that insists on driving you back into yet *another* Netscape 'service', or a dumbed down Explorer browser with pre-sets that you...just...can't...get...rid of...?

All of which would be outrageous were it strictly true. Fact is, by tomorrow morning you could build a deeply personal site and have it live for the world to see. Assuming you've got your meta-tags sorted, you stand as much chance of getting found as the next person. And with the excellence of many of the DIY site software packages, building the site will be the work of minutes. This time, the revolution is inclusive.

Me? I'm off for one of McDonald's delicious Quarter Pounder Meals (just £2.99), after which I may watch a late movie on my superb Sony WEGA 28in widescreen TV.

PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS, KOBAL, PA

Next time you're hanging around between meetings, check out what a Palm Powered™ handheld can do for you. Take the Palm™ Vx, IIIc or m100 handhelds for example. With the optional Mobile Internet Kit you can send and receive e-mails or SMS, or use the Web Clipping Applications to access the best of the net from virtually anywhere*. And we mean anywhere. With a Palm Powered handheld and the Mobile Internet Kit, you just take the Internet with you – it's that simple.

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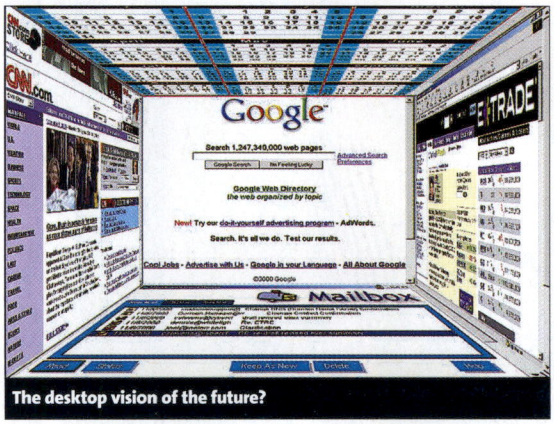
BROWSER

SURFING IN 3D

New browser enters the third dimension



The desktop vision of the future?

US COMPANY 2CE.COM IS aiming to revolutionise our online experience with the launch of the world's first 3D browser. Up to six Web pages or programs can be displayed at a time, as if they are lining the interior of a large three-dimensional cube.

Users click on a 'wall' to make it active, rotating the cube to bring it to the centre of the screen. And if each wall of the cube is a cube itself, the number of pages available to view can reach into the hundreds, leading to a major headache.

The software will speed up surfing, claims its designer, architect Mike Rosen. Instead of one Web page being replaced by another, his cube will cache and display each page as a wall as you navigate through a site.

'Netscape in 1994 took a text-based Internet and gave it a visual, magazine-like interface,' explains Rosen. 'We believe that we're taking that on to the next logical step.'

The software should be free to download from this spring, at ***www.2ce.com.***

WEB CHAT

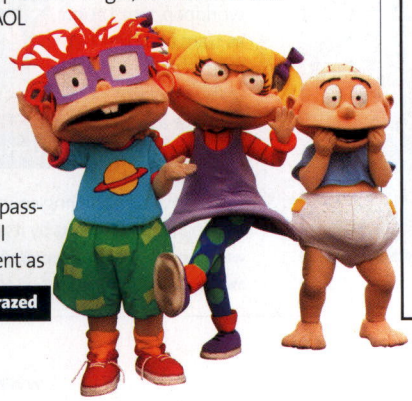
FOUR-LETTER SHOCK FOR KIDS

'Angelica' swears at junior surfers

FOUL-MOUTHED HACKERS infiltrated an AOL Webchat aimed at tiny tots.

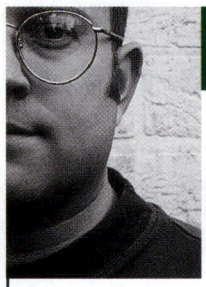
The live chat – organised by AOL content partner Nickelodeon to promote the animated flick *Rugrats in Paris* – promised kiddies a chance to chat with feisty Rugrats character Angelica. What they got instead was an expletive-laden tirade against AOL by two hackers, Murphy and Joker.

The duo used a Trojan horse virus masquerading as an AOL update to seize staffer David Regan's password, giving them full access to the chat event as AngelicaLIVE, kiddie favourite Regan's on-screen persona. Children were subsequently treated to such witty gems from the vile pair as 'Murphy and Joker f***ing own AOL you f***ing faggots'. Understandably flustered, one shocked natterer wrote: 'We know Angelica is a bad girl, but not that bad!'



Rugrats: clearly drug-crazed

PICTURES: KOBAL, PA



TIM RICHARDSON

WEB WATCHER

Fingers crossed for a free future

In a digital world there's no place for superstition. People don't fire off an email with their fingers crossed in the hope that it will arrive at its intended destination. They don't have their favourite mousemat that helps guide them mysteriously around the Web. And they don't clasp their hands together and drop to their knees each time they flick on their PC.

Well, that's what I thought. But lately I've found myself crossing my and avoiding ladders and black cats – and all because of my ISP. I've been burnt so many times by ISPs claiming to offer 'free' or unmetered Net access I've lost all sensation in my fingers.

Some witches yesterday

The year 2000 was dominated by ISPs jumping on the unmetered bandwagon, claiming they could offer Net access for a fixed cost. Most failed, rather predictably, or simply delivered a lousy service.

The biggest fiasco was AltaVista UK, which stole front-page headlines when it announced in March that it would offer unmetered Net access. It didn't, despite maintaining a pointless charade that the service was up and running. Snag is, AltaVista UK didn't just steal headlines; it stole the trust of Net users who've had to put up with broken promises and shoddy service.

'AltaVista UK stole headlines and the trust of Net users'

So why am I sitting here with my fingers crossed? Well, AOL UK is offering unmetered Net access for £14.99 a month and I've signed up. So far, so good. If it works as AOL UK currently says it should, I'll be able to access the Net without ramping up an excessively large phone bill.

Freeserve has also said it will offer a similar service by mid-January for a few quid less. And there are other ISPs, too, with similar deals in the pipeline.

The difference between now and the fiasco of the last year is that flat fee access will become commercially viable in February. This is thanks to Oftel forcing BT to change its FRIACO (Flat Rate Internet Access Call Origination) deal. Under the new scheme, ISPs won't have to pay by the minute for the connection between a user's home and the local exchange. Which is why the unmetered products on offer should be genuinely robust. Well, that's the theory – touch wood.

THE BEST, THE WORST AND THE DAFTEST STUFF ON THE WEB

HEROES & ZEROS

Hitler: the flight attendant years

MOST DEMOCRATIC IDEA

OH! WHAT A LOVELY WAR...

With tensions in Europe rising yet again after the recent EU summit, indulge your Britain vs The Rest mentality with a spot of healthy virtual Hun-bashing . Hot on the heels of England's distinctly underwhelming Euro 2000 victory over the Germans comes a new WWII game spreading rapidly through the Web telegraph – except this one is made by the old enemy. German games company CDV is launching Sudden Strike in the UK, offering players the chance to re-enact classic battles as commander of Allied, German or Russian forces, or to massacre European friends and relatives over the Internet. 'The fact that people from Britain can re-enact "friendly" WWII battles with people from Germany is a testament to how far our society has progressed,' claims CDV's Terry Malham, somewhat worryingly. 'It's a nice touch that the Internet has broken down barriers that were once there, to the level that we are now engaging in friendly war games.'

www.suddenstrike.com

Beavers: not Web-friendly

MOST OBSCENE NAME

BEAVER IN BAN BOTHER

Philadelphia's prestigious Beaver College has been forced to change its name after seeing applications plummet by 30 per cent. Apparently, prospective students are being deterred from visiting the US college's site by Net censoring software blocking the word 'Beaver' on the grounds of its sexual connotations. Well, they're kinda cute, but really... *www.beaver.edu*

SCARIEST IDEA It's no yolking matter

AS THE FARCICAL US ELECTION PROVED, democracy as we know it is a tired old concept with no place in the modern world. But take heart, for there is another way, currently being amply demonstrated by eggvote.com. The idea is brilliantly simple: pick a couple of candidates from, say, the election race, American news anchors or Web entrepreneurs and you're given three minutes to 'throw' virtual eggs at their faces as they whizz around the screen. Your egg votes are then collated into a grand total and a winner declared. A Romanian election special is currently underway, and it can surely only be a matter of time before Messrs Blair and Hague get egg on their faces.

www.eggvote.com

Eggbox: a messier way of registering your vote

BEST PUNCH-UP

'TAKE THAT, OUR KID'

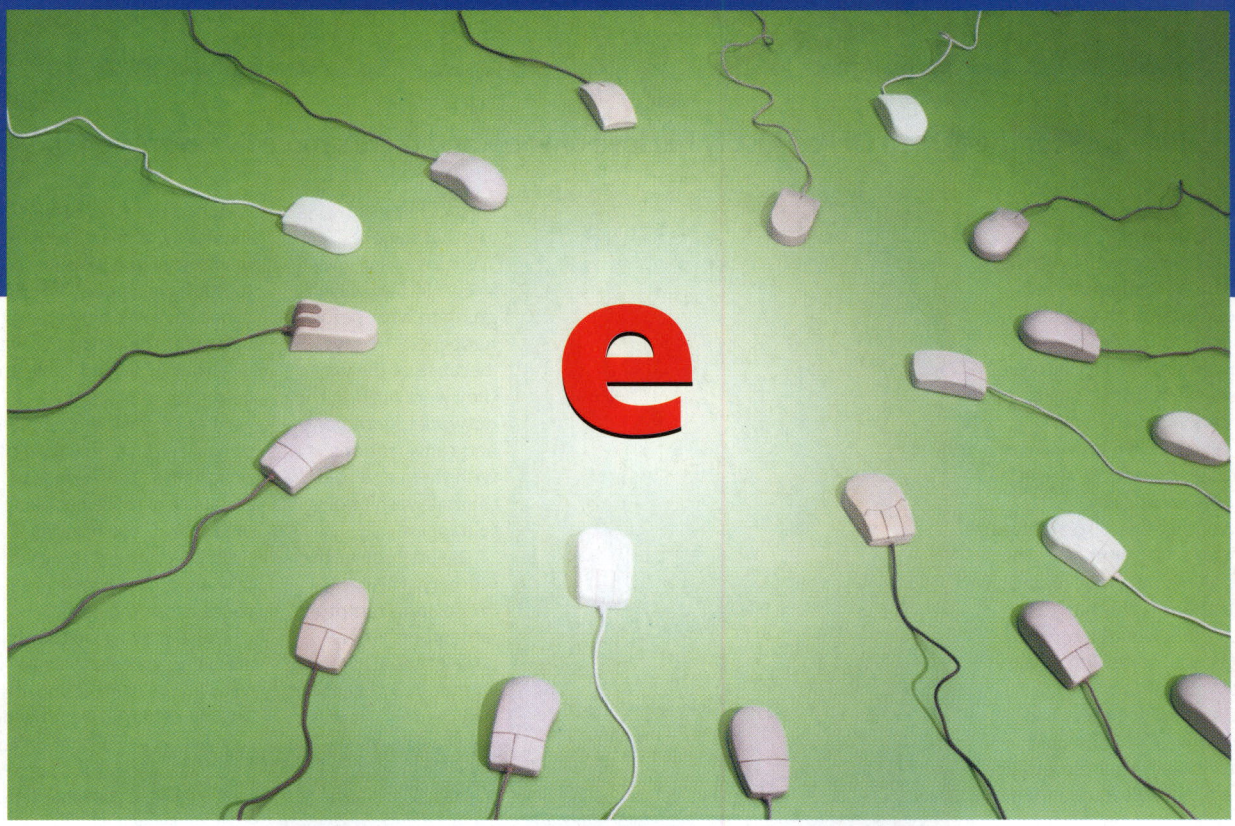
Bored to death with the ongoing Robbie Williams-Liam Gallagher feud? Well, now you have the power to settle the pop star spat once and for all, as they're both in the ring in a two-player Shockwave game from music site worldpop.com. Laugh as Liam bloodies Robbie's nose with a tasty upper-cut. Grimace as a right-hook from Williams floors Gallagher. Sadly, an accompanying soundtrack of choice cussing is conspicuous by its absence.

www.worldpop.com/home/cif.cfm?dir=games&url=mail_link_big_fight.htm

Liam and Robbie go for it

PICTURES: KOBAL, CORBIS

Everybody's Doing It.



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The day Madonna danced on your desktop

Record audience sees the Queen Of Pop justify her love online – and there's more live events on the way

They called it the most exclusive gig ever held, but we were all invited thanks to the Internet. And though fewer than 3,000 crammed in to the Brixton Academy in south London to see Madonna's first British gig in seven years, more than nine million watched live on ***msn.co.uk*** and through her official site at ***www.madonnamusic.com***.

The Webcast was also archived on MSN for a fortnight after the gig, and as *the net* went to press, the indications were that 30 million surfers would have seen the gig. It was, quite simply, the biggest Webcast ever.

The clamour for tickets had been amazing. One man paid £2,204 for two in an Internet auction as a birthday surprise for his wife. All eyes were on Brixton and even the ice-cool queen of pop felt the pressure. 'I get so nervous,' she revealed. 'Y'know, I haven't been on stage in a while'.

The nerves weren't confined to the performers. For if Brixton was full of punters desperate for tickets, the Internet was chocka with fans wanting to see the Webcast. MSN had to give the surfing public its piece of Madonna. It was a big responsibility, but the company was ready.

'MSN has a history of events you wouldn't get anywhere else,' beams Tracy Blacher, MSN UK's busy marketing manager. The previous world record audience was three million for Paul McCartney's return to the Cavern club in Liverpool, but this was always going to be even bigger. Co-operation was required.

'Competitors worked together for the first time to use servers around the world,' says Blacher. 'For the Cavern gig we'd brought all the traffic to the UK and completely overloaded it, which was a nightmare. We quickly learned to spread it around.'

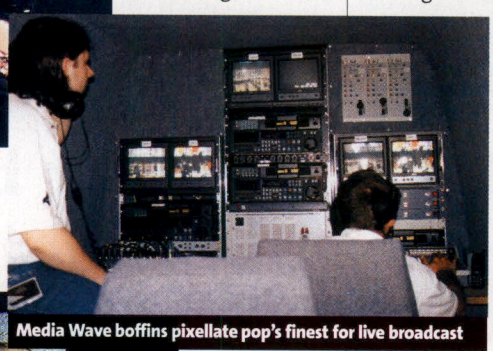
Technical help was at hand in the form of Media Wave, which carried out the pre-event co-ordination and planning before providing the network infrastructure and onsite encoding. It's not a new responsibility.

'Madonna was the 957th live event we'd Webcast during 2000,' explains Media Wave MD Chris Frampton.

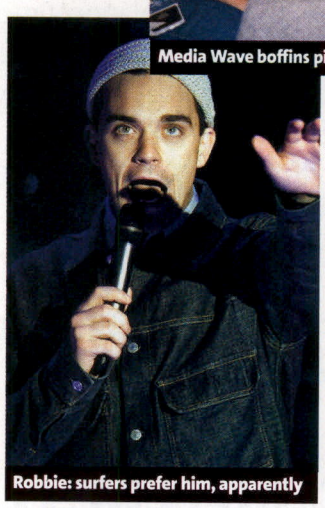
'Imagine bringing 4,000 servers together and you've got to globally load-balance them,' says Frampton. 'We had servers lined up in Australia and Japan and were trying to think where there wouldn't be huge traffic so we could locate a server there, load-balance against it and use some of their spare capacity.'

It's clear the industry is learning and growing, with events like McCartney's homecoming and Robbie Williams' Dublin extravaganza raising Webcasting's profile. Frampton recalls the shortcomings of another major Webcast event: 'We knew Net Aid wasn't going to work before it happened,' he says, 'because of the way they were putting the network together. We had conversations with them and told them it wasn't going to happen.'

The attitude of the industry is also improving. Frampton remembers when none of the ISPs wanted to know about Webcasting – 'It was like, "put video on our network? You must be mad!"' – and he maintains that the blame for any technical hitches lies squarely with the ISPs.



Media Wave boffins pixellate pop's finest for live broadcast



Robbie: surfers prefer him, apparently

'We can keep very good tabs on the bandwidth that's being delivered across the entire network and when the whole thing falls flat it's with the ISPs, particularly in the UK,' he grimaces, referring to the problems some surfers had accessing the Webcast. 'Local ISPs run leased lines into other ISPs and refuse to give up bandwidth. But whether you got on and watched the whole thing flawlessly, as many people did, or whether you were unfortunate to not have a good last-mile connection, it's only going to get better for the consumer with the rate that ADSL and cable are being put in place.'

At MSN, Blacher is similarly upbeat about the advent of broadband. 'These kinds of events help move people towards broadband,' she reasons. 'Every time we do these things, the take-up on the higher connections increases'.

Those moving up to broadband are being greeted with amazingly clear images and sound. It's like leaving behind the grainy picture you get on your black-and-white portable telly, claims Blacher.

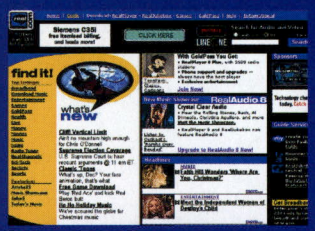
Frampton agrees and thinks the popularity of the Madonna gig can only speed up the convergence between television and the Net. 'There's no doubt that this has been a catalyst for change throughout the industry. It may not be fully grown yet but there are signs that the spots of puberty are disappearing.' In addition, many surfers have woken up to Webcasting for the first time through Madonna, and additional downloads of RealPlayer will help the industry.

And as broadband brings broadcast-quality streaming, the surfer's choice can only widen. 'What's exciting is that anyone who wants to broadcast anything, whether live or on-demand, will be able to,' says Frampton. 'I can see the day that churches will have ISDN or leased lines to Webcast ceremonies for people who can't make it. Well, maybe not churches. Then again, we have been approached to do something with the Vatican...' From the pop Madonna to the real Madonna?

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: LOFI, PA, MAVERICK/WEA

SITE GUIDE

The bookmarks you'll need to enjoy the best Webcasts available online



REAL GUIDE

realguide.real.com

Real provides the free software to watch Webcasts, while the Real Guide acts as a searchable directory of live events across the Net.

VIRTUE TV

www.virtuetv.com

An innovative British broadcaster, Virtue leads the way in domestic Webcasting, specialising in live music. See also ***www.nme.com*** and ***www.dotmusic.com.***

MTV

www.mtv.com

The pioneering music channel is characteristically speedy in beefing up online content, with exclusive Web sets and documentaries alongside news and features.

QUOKKA

www.quokka.com

Quokka scored a major scoop in the summer, when it gained exclusive rights to Webcast the Olympics. More coverage, including football and motorsport, is planned.

WEMBLEY TV

www.wembleytv.com

A newcomer to the Webcasting market, Wembley covers much the same ground as Virtue, but is worth checking up on for music exclusives.

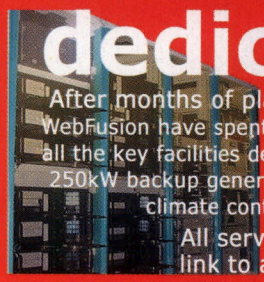
STREAMBOX

www.streambox.com

An essential bookmark for the dedicated Webcast watcher, Streambox offers a guide to all that's up and coming across the Net, but also points you towards archived gigs and events you might have missed.

dedicated servers

dedicated-servers.co.uk



After months of planning and implementation, the new WebFusion Data Centre is now open. WebFusion have spent over £1 million creating the UK's most advanced web hosting data facility, featuring all the key facilities demanded by dedicated server customers. APC Symmetra UPS, FM200 fire supression, 250kW backup generator, Cat 2 lighting, 100Mb network, Cisco switches and routers, Ultra grade aircon & climate control, water detection, CCTV, swipe entry and state of the art fire and intruder alarms.

All servers come complete with 2 IP addresses and 5GB bandwidth per month, and link to all WebFusion's data centre facilities plus multiple fast internet connections.

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Just £99.99 per month

COBALT RAQ4

The high-end 'Web-in-a-Box' solution. Easy to control, no jargon or systems knowhow req'd. Ideal for resellers who don't want to be 'techiebods', web designers, etc. Fast, well spec'd machines, ready to run, 2 IP addresses, 5GB bandwidth per month and fast internet connections.

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The internet environment for Windows specialists. Ideal for MCSE/MSCP's, VB programmers, projects that need MS Office backend and/or ASP support. Fully spec'd machines with NT pre-installed, 2 IP addresses, 5GB bandwidth per month, & multiple internet connections.

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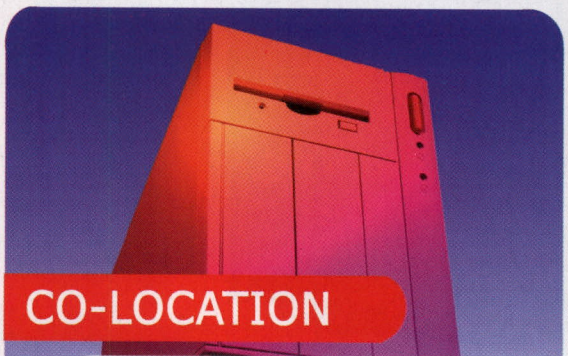

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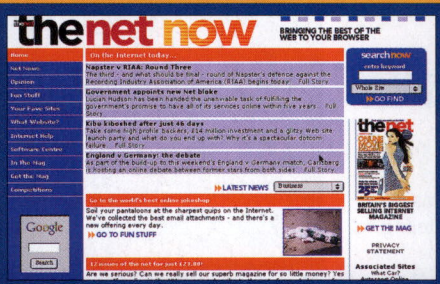
NET NEWS, FUN STUFF AND OPINION

Featuring an up-to-the-minute, geek-free Internet news service from your favourite Net magazine. We'll keep you informed of all the latest ISP and Web news as it breaks!

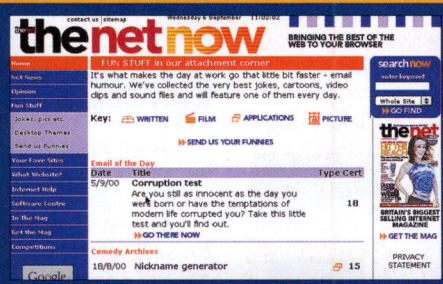
www.thenetnow.co.uk

WHAT'S INSIDE THE NET NOW?



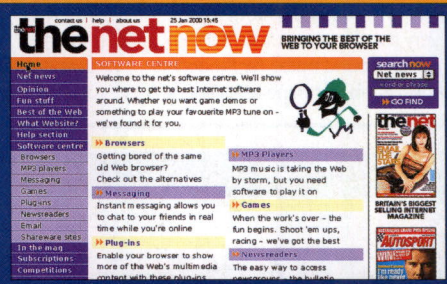
NET NEWS

Internet news updated every day: the latest sites, and who's Webcasting where and when.



FUN STUFF

Need something to pass the time? Bored at work and looking for some light relief? Check this out!



SOFTWARE CENTRE

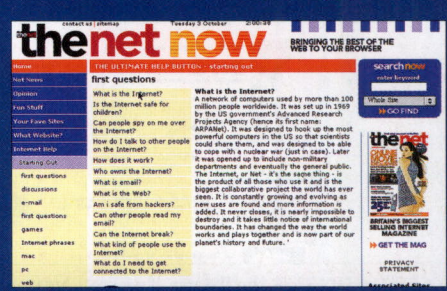
Whether for work or play, we've searched out the software to make life online more enjoyable.

WHAT WEBSITE?

There's a huge number of URLs in *the net* each month – and we've archived every site we've ever featured!

BEST OF THE WEB

What's your favourite Web site? We'll feature one Web site every week from your recommendations.



HELP SECTION

If you're struggling to know your FTP from your WWW, we've got all the answers for you!

thenetnow THIS MONTH

WEBSITES | MOVIES | DVD | MUSIC | GAMES

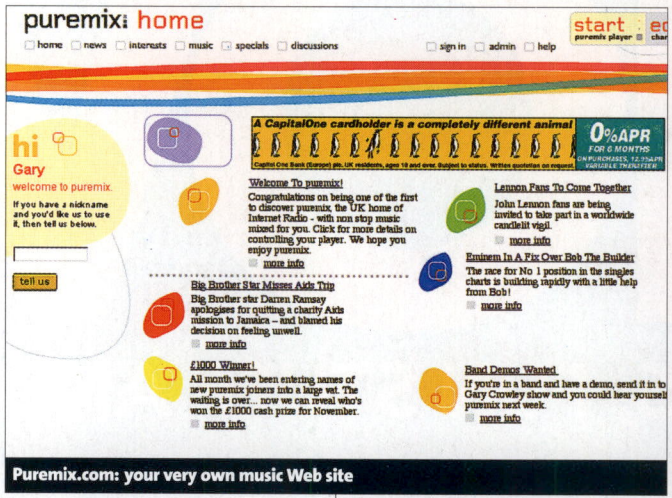
WEB SITES

Music maestro, please

Top tunes, booze – there's a party theme to this month's Web site round-up

Sick of Coldplay? Bored stiff with Eminem? Whatever the merits of these and other fine artists, listening to the radio can grow tiresome because it's always someone else's playlist. But now you can generate a personal hit-list at Puremix (***www.puremix.com***), described as the UK's 'first ever personalised multi-channel music Web site'. And yes, it's even multi-channel, so you can have gentle lullabies for mornings and bangin' choons for those pre-club moments.

Also useful for those pre-club moments is alcohol. Well, if they're going to ask ridiculous prices for lurid cocktails, it's better to get a few in first. And where better than the Atlantic Beer Club (***www.atlanticbeerclub.com***), a jovial new site which – in addition to saving you dosh on your favourite tipple – will also teach you bar tricks, provide arcade games and furnish you with strange news stories from around the world. Membership is £20 per year but you get that much back every month in beer vouchers – no, not ten-pound notes, *real* vouchers redeemable at offline off licences.



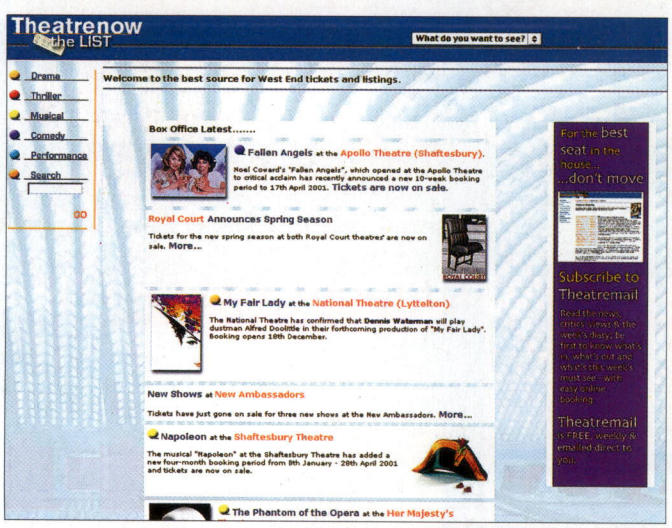
Puremix.com: your very own music Web site

Easy on the alcohol though, because it can inhibit your word power – and there's nothing like impressing people with loquacious neologisms. *Idiot's Guide* author Paul McFedries obviously thinks so, because his Word Spy page at ***www.logophilia.com/WordSpy*** keeps an eye on those new phrases which pop up in the press and explains their background and usage. You can sign up for a daily email if you'd like something new arriving in your inbox every day.

itrustyou: I think so, anyway...

Get a pet for Christmas? Make sure it's a pet for life by registering the critter at the Kennel Club-affiliated ***www.petlog.org.uk.*** Not that it has to be a dog; the million-strong database ranges from budgies to elephants, so you can check the history of that Norwegian Blue before you cough up the dosh.

Sadly, not everyone is trustworthy. Sorry to break it to you, but there are bad people out there. I Trust You (***www.itrustyou.com***) is the well-named site which provides a multilingual third-party middle-man for online transactions, in case you've got doubts about the geezer offering a Mercedes for £1,000. And if that makes you nervous about swindlers and robbers generally, you can now go online to insure your precious laptop with 'Britain's most successful computer policy' at ***www.completecomputercover.com***.



LAST BUT NOT LEAST, the theatre. If you're a greasepaint fan, sign up for Theatremail at ***www.theatrenow.com*** and you'll get a weekly email rounding up news, events, critiques, and interviews with stars of the stage. It also offers London listings, as does The Society of London Theatre at ***www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk***. And those who dwell outside the capital can always turn to ***www.whatsonstage.com***...

WEBSITE WORDS: GARY PARKINSON

Top PlayStation rentals

1 *Driver 2*
2 *FIFA 2001*
3 *The World is Not Enough*
4 *Tomb Raider Chronicles*
5 *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*
6 *Player Manager 2001*
7 *Chicken Run*
8 *Tony Hawk: Pro Skater 2*
9 *Prince Naseem Boxing*
10 *Bugs Bunny and Taz: Time Busters*

www.blockbuster.co.uk

Bestselling books

1 *The Amber Spyglass* – Philip Pullman
2 *How to be a Domestic Goddess* – Nigella Lawson
3 *Appetite* – Nigel Slater
4 *The Truth* – Terry Pratchett
5 *Hitler: Nemesis* – Ian Kershaw

www.waterstones.co.uk

Bestselling albums

1 *One* – The Beatles
2 *Music* – Madonna
3 *Sing When You're Winning* – Robbie Williams
4 *Now 47* – Various
5 *Greatest Hits* – Texas
6 *All That You Can't Leave Behind* – U2
7 *Parachutes* – Coldplay
8 *Coast to Coast* – Westlife
9 *Best of* – Blur
10 *A Day Without Rain* – Enya

www.amazon.co.uk

Preordered DVDs and videos

1 *Toy Story Collector's Edition*
2 *Mission: Impossible 2*
3 *The Complete Thin Blue Line*
4 *Voyager: Seven of Nine, Vol 2*
5 *The Fantasia Collection*

www.blackstar.co.uk

Most searched names

1 Pamela Anderson
2 Jennifer Love Hewitt
3 Jenna Jameson
4 Tommy's Bookmarks
5 Zelda
6 Lolita
7 Mardi Gras
8 Shania Twain
9 Delta Airlines
10 Michael Jordan

www.searchwords.com

MOVIES

Die hard? Not Bruce...

Danny Graydon watches the invincible Mr Willis

Quills

Geoffrey Rush, Kate Winslet ★★★

Philip Kaufman's decidedly political (and effective) take on the Marquis de Sade sees the focus on the vilified pornographer as a pioneer of free speech, rather than unutterably hardcore porn. As the voluptuous accomplice to De Sade's nefarious plans to publish beyond the confines of the asylum, Winslet offers an intriguing balance to Rush's sometimes overly slimy Marquis.

www.quillsmovie.com *Intriguing pop-up introduction to de Sade, wisely available in adult and PG versions.*

Vertical Limit

Chris O'Donnell, Bill Paxton ★★★

Chris O'Donnell makes a credible Everyman action hero as the guilt-ridden mountaineer who must confront his demons on a rescue mission to K2. While the cast impresses, the real star of this is the stunningly choreographed action set-pieces, courtesy of Martin Campbell (*GoldenEye*). The inevitable *Cliffhanger* comparisons aside, this is packed with gripping thrills.

www.sony.com/verticallimit *Screensavers, trailers, Webcasts, Flash, and best of all a mountaineering RPG... no limit for this Sony site.*

***Quills*: porn or free speech?**

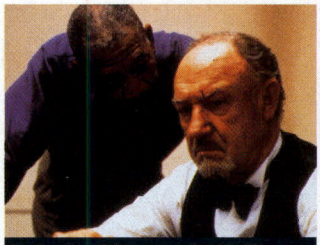
Bounce

Ben Affleck, Gwyneth Paltrow ★★

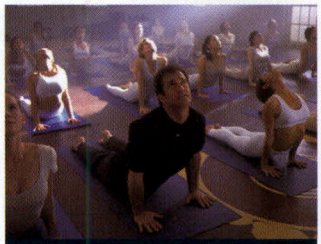
Headline-grabbing romance aside, Ben 'n' Gwynnie strangely struggle to generate on-screen chemistry in this competent but strangely empty rom-com. She's a widow whose husband died in a plane crash; a year later, she gets visited by the ad exec who was supposed to be on the doomed flight in his place. Some fine moments and an excellent supporting cast, but ultimately dull.

upcomingmovies.com/bounce.html *In the unexplained absence of an official site, you'll have to make do with this text-heavy discussion.*

***Bounce*: ultimately lacking**



***Under Suspicion*: superior thrills**



***What Women Want*: who knows?**

Under Suspicion

Gene Hackman, Morgan Freeman ★★★★

Though multiplex-unfriendly, this talky yet brilliantly tense thriller sees two acting heavyweights give superior performances. A police captain (Freeman) and an attorney (Hackman) square off during an interrogation over child murders. With Hackman in a trademark morally-challenged role, Monica Belluci excels as his mysterious wife.

www.undersuspicion.com *The official site goes for style over substance, and is annoyingly slow to load.*

What Women Want

Mel Gibson, Helen Hunt ★★★

A funny romantic comedy that will have the ladies drooling and the men slyly grinning. Mel plays a charming sexist who develops the ability to hear women's thoughts when they're close to him. No slouch with the one-liner, this is a tailor-made vehicle for Mr. Rugged Charm, with Helen Hunt providing a feisty sparring partner and Bette Midler a hilarious cameo.

www.whatwomenwantmovie.com *Men: find out what women want with the interactive quiz. Women: agree or disagree online.*

Traffic

Steven Bauer, James Brolin ★★★★

Steven Soderbergh's latest takes a piercing look at that perennial political hot potato, Drugs In America, and shows a situation riven with futility and hypocrisy on both sides of the law. With a raft of stunning performances (including Benicio del Toro, Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas), *Traffic* is confrontational, bleak, but undoubtedly powerful, making it a bold, assured work.

www.traffic-movie.com *Dark, fast-moving and slightly bemusing – but always interesting.*

The Claim

Peter Mullan, Wes Bentley ★★★★

In 1849, a gold prospector (Mullan) exchanges his wife and child for a bag of gold; 20 years later, they return to settle the betrayal. Based on a Thomas Hardy novel, director Winterbottom has created a sweeping, majestic Western, with *American Beauty*'s Bentley no-flash-in-the-pan talent and even Milla Jovovich redeeming herself following *Joan of Arc*.

www.theclaimmovie.com *Includes a virtual tour round the set and a chance to read and rate the script.*

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

Unbreakable ★★★★★

Bruce Willis, Samuel L Jackson

Wisely avoiding replicating *The Sixth Sense*'s shocks, writer/director M. Night Shyamalan has delivered a fascinating follow-up that tries to marry the exaggerated world of comic books with the fuzzy morality of reality. Willis is the sole survivor of a train crash who is contacted by brittle-boned comic art dealer Jackson, who seems to understand Willis' apparent invincibility – and its link to his own condition. Sly humour undercuts the solemn mood, and Jackson is a flamboyant counterbalance to Willis' melancholic 'hero'. Boasting more mystery than intensity, this is a captivating effort. And yes, there's a twist.

studio.go.com/movies/unbreakable/intro.html *Effectively plays the story with a poker face.*

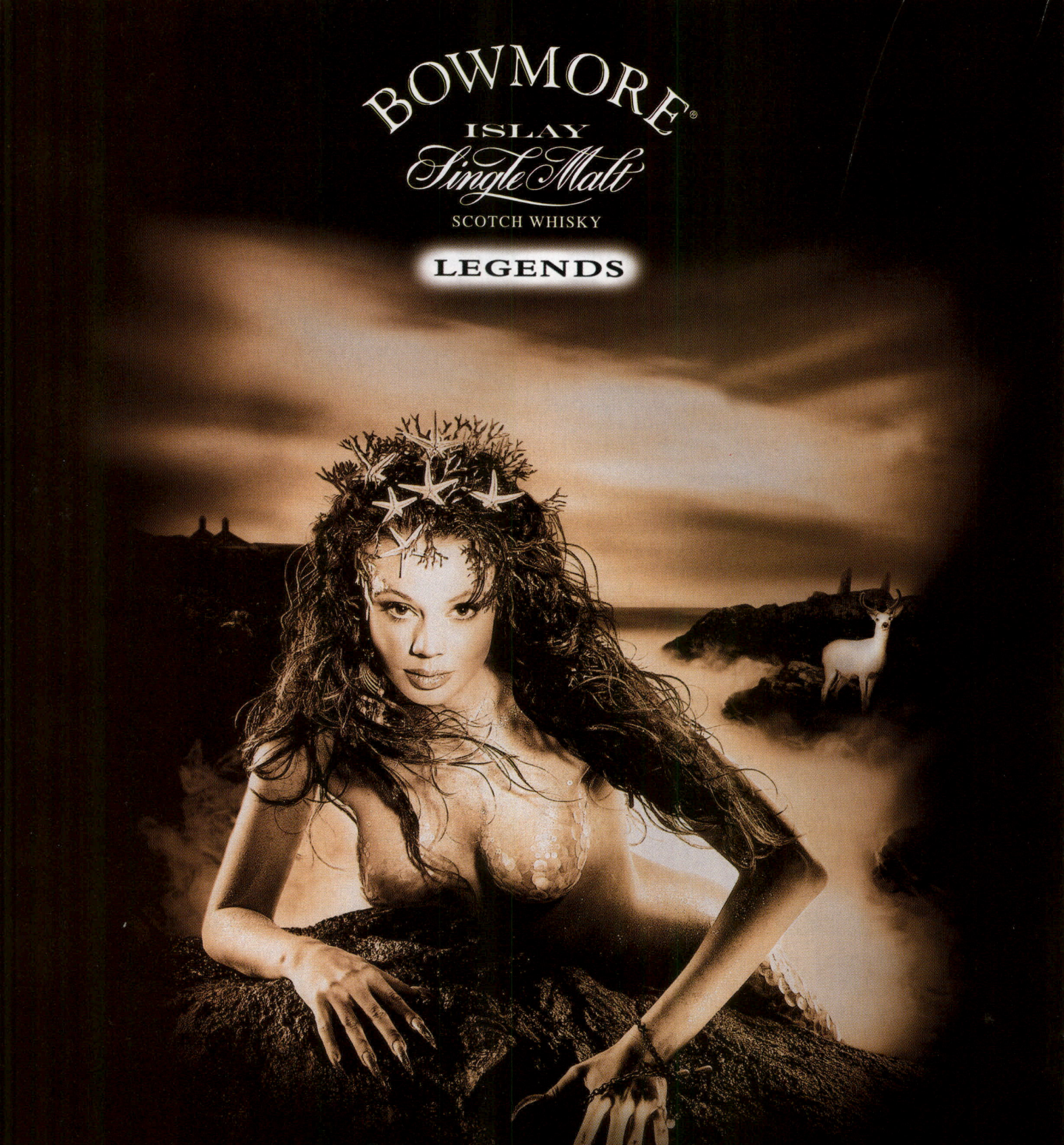
BOWMORE®

ISLAY

Single Malt

SCOTCH WHISKY

LEGENDS



~ THE LEGEND OF ~

THE SEA MAIDEN

The poor fisherman looked forlornly at his empty net. Suddenly, a sea maiden rose to the surface of the sea. "I promise you good fishing, in return for your first born son," said she. Desperately hungry, the fisherman eagerly consented. Soon, a son was born to him, but he could not give the boy up. A soothsayer said that to break the promise, the boy would have to find the ghostly white stag that so many feared, slay it, and break the golden egg hidden inside. Years later, the son – now a young man – went on a quest for the deer. When the sea maiden heard of this, she became angry and began thinking of ways to get revenge...

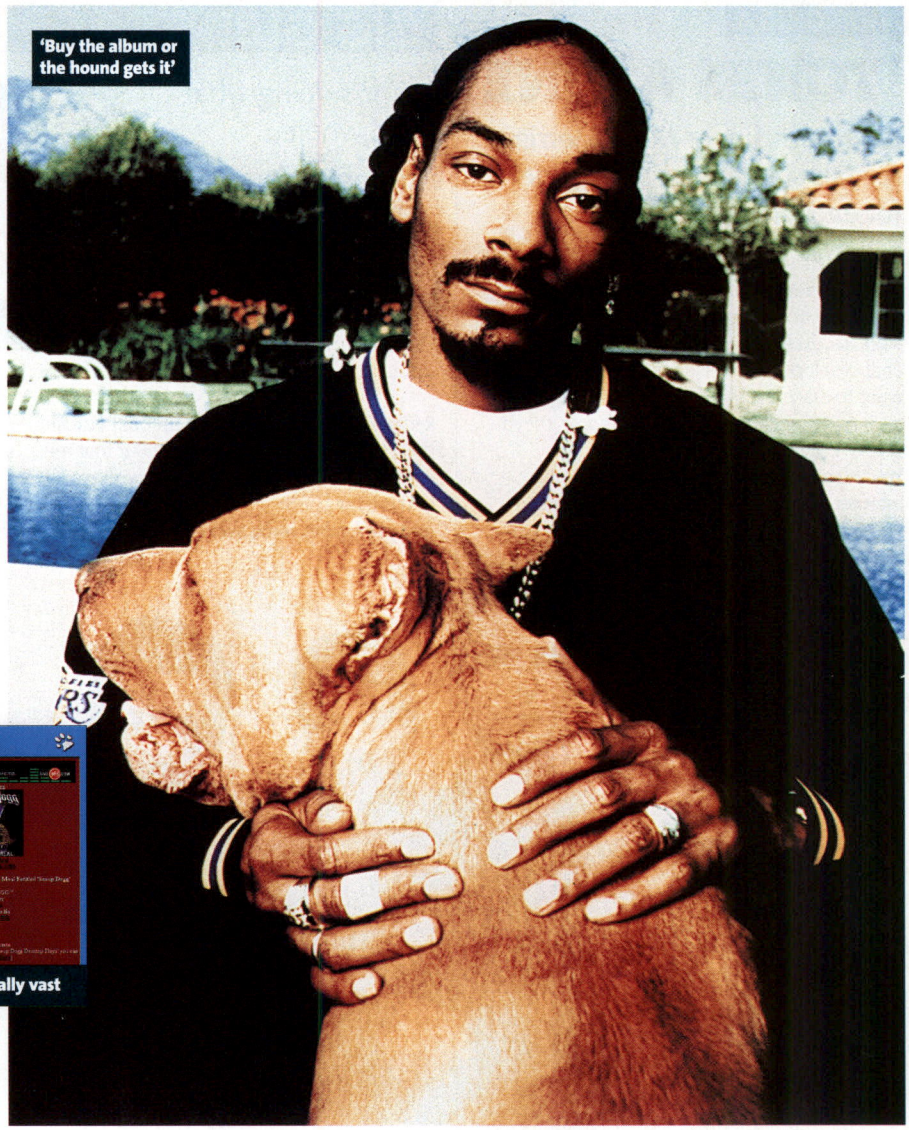
DISCOVER WHAT BECAME OF THE OLD FISHERMAN AND HIS SON AT **www.morrisonbowmore.co.uk**

Smoke on the water

MUSIC ALBUM OF THE MONTH

Leader of the pack

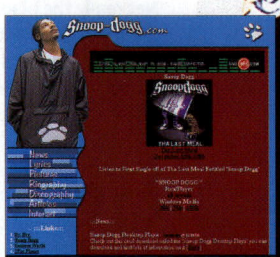
Sam Upton claims the Dogg's latest puts him back on top



Snoop Dogg

Tha Last Meal **PRIORITY/VIRGIN** ★★★★★

The man the IRS calls Calvin Broadus has been a little promiscuous of late. With appearances on albums by Wu-Tang Clan, Dr Dre, Mystikal and Warren G plus his own weekly radio show, he's certainly been spreading himself out a bit. And his detractors have pointed out that after a disappointing last album, *Top Dogg*, he needs to pull his hip hop socks up if he wants to regain the glory of *Doggystyle*, one of the 90s' greatest rap records. But with *Tha Last Meal* he's silenced the doubters in some style. Having roped in revered producer Dr Dre, the beats are extra-slick and the trademark P-funk even smoother than ever. *Issues* possesses a funk of Rick James proportions as Snoop rails against everyone wanting a piece of him, while *Ready 2 Ride* is an all-cussing, all-swinging triumph. Proof that hip hop is still in a state of extremely rude health.

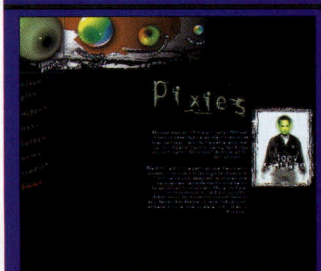


Snoop-Dogg.com: lyrically vast

www.snoop-dogg.com

A fan site with seemingly every Snoop lyric ever written, some fine pictures and a large array of audio clips which you can listen to on the Snoop Dogg Desktop Playa.

MUSIC NEW RELEASES



The Pixies

Complete B-sides **4AD** ★★★

The legacy of the Boston masters of controlled noise lives on with the release of this ragbag of covers, live tracks, previously unreleased recordings and re-recorded songs. Neil Young covers like *Winterlong* and early jams such as *Velvety Instrumental Version* may delight confirmed Pixies nuts, but like most b-side collections, it's not for the casual fan.

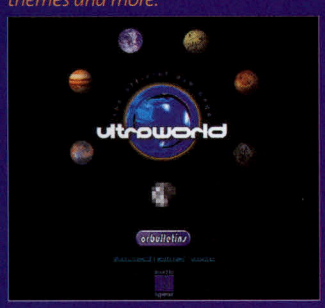
www.pixies.com *News, videos and eerie pulsating baby heads.*

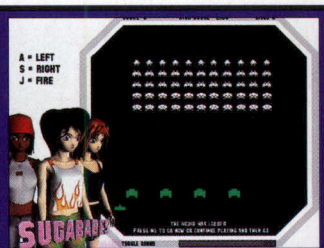
The Orb

Cydonia **UNIVERSAL/ISLAND** ★★★

The first offering in three years from the kings of cosmic ambient, *Cydonia* is something of a return to form for Alex Paterson. More considered pieces like *Once More* and *Centuries* hark neatly back to classic second album *U F Orb*, and while it may not have quite the same impact as previous efforts The Orb are certainly making up ground fast.

www.theorb.com *Techy site with branded screensavers, fonts, desktop themes and more.*





Sugababes

One Touch **LONDON** ★★★★

Not another spin on the girl band cash cow, but a sass-soul trio with more streetsmarts than most, as this debut rightly points out. Single *Overload* oozes style with its Destiny's Child knowledge of the beat, and *One Foot In* is full of righteous class and sophistication. There may be some ill-advised syrupy ballads poking their tiny button noses in, but in the main *One Touch* is a record of a maturity well beyond its makers' years.

www.sugababes.com

Choose a cartoon character to wander around the girls' cyber-home.

ELO

Greatest Hits **EPIC** ★★★★

The Electric Light Orchestra emerged in the mid-70s with a sophisticated sound complete with sweeping strings, French horns and early electro flourishes. Here you've got a formidable 37 tracks going right through the hits (*Evil Woman*, *Mr Blue Sky*, *Livin' Thing*, etc) to more obscure treats. A 70s ironists dream, ELO are about due for a revival; hopefully this is the compilation to do it.

home.pacific.net.hk/~bluesky

A pleasingly strange site made by the Asian ELO fan club with some neat little games. Quite bizarre.

PICTURES: RETNA

MUSIC Q&A

'TONES ALONE

Bluetones singer Mark Morriss reveals solo album plans: one for each band member

You're quite a Net-savvy band. Just what does the Internet offer an outfit like the Bluetones?
To begin with we simply used our site, ***www.bluetones.co.uk***, for imparting information to people. That developed into selling tickets and music. We want to make the thing as interactive as possible, such as letting fans vote for which songs they'd like to hear on the recent tour.
You've sold singles exclusively online. Is the Internet eventually going to cut out the need for record companies?
Record companies will not be cut out because there's still a role for them to play. But that role will change. The Internet gives a lot more power to the artist.
And yet it takes some away, when Napster users can download your music for free...
My only reservation with software like Napster is that people start expecting to get their music for nothing. I *do* mind our songs being freely available, but not enough to steal people's MP3 files from them. There needs to be some sort of system in place so I can still get my money.
Less established bands are happier to give their music away – you were the music judges for BT's new-talent showcase, GetOutThere (*www.getoutthere.com*), in November. But is the Net really the place for new bands to make it?
I still think the best way to promote any band is to play live. We didn't really send our tapes round to record companies when we started – we just gigged up and down the country. The Internet is just another tool you can use, almost like an electronic bulletin board.
What will we see on your site in the future?
We're all working on solo projects. We all write stuff that isn't really Bluetones material, but they'll be side projects which show off the more flippant side of our songwriting. They will all come out at the same time and they'll only be available on the Net. There's so much more we can do on the site – we're only just realising what an outlet it could prove to be.

That's it, smile for the camera

GIG GUIDE

Who's doing what and where...

THE OFFSPRING
Jan 17 Glasgow SECC **19** Manchester Evening News Arena **21** London Wembley Arena

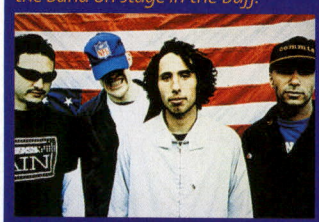
MARILYN MANSON
Jan 21 Birmingham NEC **22** Manchester Evening News Arena **24** London Docklands Arena

REEF
Jan 25 Birmingham Academy **26** Ipswich Regent **28** Cornwall Truro Hall **29** Guildford Civic **30** Folkestone Leas Cliff Hall Feb **1** London Forum

MUSIC NEW RELEASES

Rage Against The Machine

Renegades **SONY** ★★★
Squealing singer Zack de la Rocha's final RATM album makes for a disappointing end. Seemingly dashed off in half a day, *Renegades* is a covers album including shouty stabs at MC5's *Kick Out The Jams* and Dylan's *Maggie's Farm*, but they're all rendered indistinguishable thanks to the omnipresent slick nu-metal polish. It would be better to buy their first eponymous album and let them leave with dignity.
www.ratm.com *Social injustice and the band on stage in the buff.*

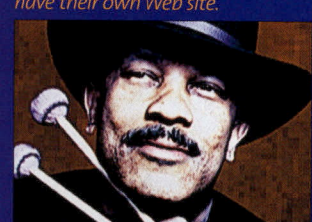


Cypress Hill

Live At The Fillmore **COLUMBIA** ★★★
For some reason, after a lengthy absence, live albums are now firmly back in vogue. Yet there aren't too many rap albums recorded outside the studio, and *Live At The Fillmore* is a good example of why. Despite their legendary intake of the 'erb, on record the Hill are tight and focused with a high-quality beat quotient. Live, however, they're a ragbag of squeaks and muddy samples. The words 'contract' and 'filler' spring to mind.
www.cypresshill.co.uk *More a tribute page to cannabis than a band sites. Read all about the history of marijuana and grow your own virtual weed.*

Various

Really Heavy Soul **OCHO** ★★★★
'Dirty guitar driven fat-assed funk' says the cover of this compilation chronicling a time in the early 70s when black musicians picked up on the hippy vibes still floating around and injected soul music with a low-down dance element. Thus Chairmen Of The Board, Curtis Mayfield and Parliament fight it out with Roy Ayers, Wilson Pickett and The Chi-Lites for funk supremacy, with every track a previously hidden gem.
www.royayers.com *The king of the vibes and recognised leader of acid jazz is one of the few artists here to have their own Web site.*



INTERVIEW: PAUL WINSLOW; PICTURES: ANGELA LUBRANO, LIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

going, going, gone-on-line.

Hugh from Huddersfield had a guitar signed by Rikki Riff that didn't inspire him any more. However, Pat from Poole wanted it desperately. eBay™ brought them together.

Whether it's rock memorabilia you're looking for, or just cool gadgets, you'll find them on eBay at a price that suits you. Discover the most popular person-to-person secure trading community on the web, with over 4 million auctions happening every day in over 4,000 categories.

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GAMES

Shenmue or snowballs?

Whatever your tastes, there's a new game for you

Driver 2 *(PlayStation)*
★★★★★
Driver set new standards for PSX racing games and while the sequel lacks *Gran Turismo 2*'s realism, it has the coolest storyline this side of a Tarantino movie. Undercover cops, high-speed pursuits, and the hero Tanner's clothes designed by Ozwald Boateng. It even betters the original with four new cities, extra vehicles and numerous multiplayer options.
www.driver-2.com *Great Flash-enhanced site with all the usual games gubbins, plus a lot more.*

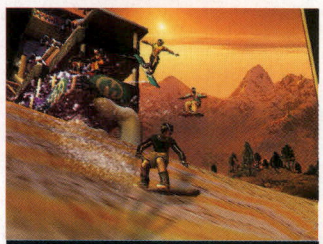
SSX *(PS2)* ★★★★★
A snowboarding game like no other, *SSX* is the kind of experience where the PS2's ability to render wonderful graphics and pump out excellent stereo really pays dividends. It's so immersing, you can almost feel the cold of the snow as you fall on your butt.
ssx.ea.com *A slick site matching the game's look. You'll need the 'Beatnik' plug-in, though.*

The World is Not Enough *(N64)*
★★★★★
Despite being based on the Brosnan blockbuster, here you'll find yourself seemingly caught up in sub-plots that the director decided to cut. But forget the movie and what you have is an excellent first-person stealth-shooter, with a good dash of Bond style. The PSX and N64 versions are different, if you're well-heeled enough to own both consoles.
007.ea.com *A handsome site details Bond games on all of the formats.*

Jet Set Radio *(Dreamcast)*
★★★★★
Ever get the urge to graffiti the side of buildings? *Jet Set Radio* gives you the opportunity to express yourself using the medium of spray paint while you skate around 21st-century (ie contemporary) Tokyo. Reminiscent of the also excellent *Crazy Taxi*, *Jet Set Radio* is yet another of the titles begging the question: just why would you need a PlayStation 2?
www.gamecenter.com/Consoles/Features/Interviews/Jetseti *What the Sega bods have to say about* JSR.

Tomb Raider Chronicles *(PC)*
★★★★
Lara is back – perhaps for the last time. Considering she died at the end of the game before last, it can't be long until the buxom beauty is relegated to cameos in *Resident Evil*. You know what to expect here: puzzles, running around and the odd bit of atmospheric music to let you know you're about to be squished. She's still fab, though.
www.tombraider.com/trchronicles *Accomplished site aimed at virtual stalker types. Download Lara wallpaper, images and join her fan club.*

***Driver 2*: crazy – but very, very cool**

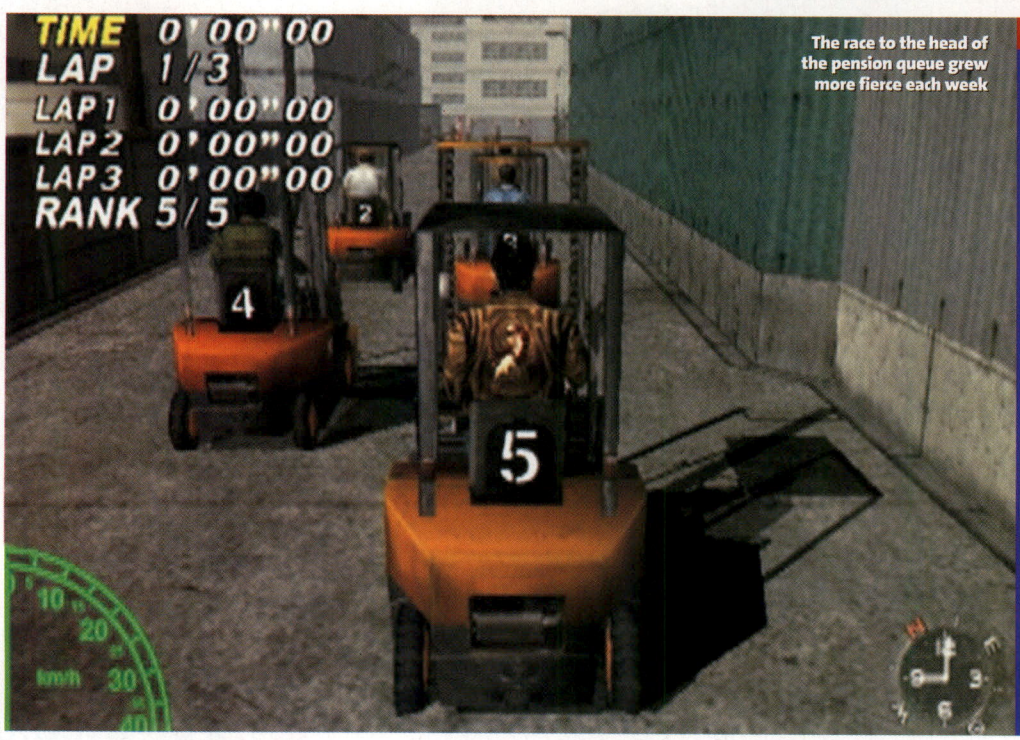

***SSX*: no danger of hypothermia**

***Jet Set Radio*: graffiti your way around**

***Tomb Raider Chronicles*: Lara's back**

Sheep *(PC)*
★★★
These woolly-headed creatures are actually beings from another planet, put on Earth to monitor the development of humanity. Your job is to herd them the hell out of here. Graphically reminiscent of *Micro Machines* and entertaining enough to keep the kids busy, *Sheep* doesn't quite have what it takes to become a post-pub classic.
www.saveoursheep.com *Flash-enabled site with movies and screenshots to download.*

Sacrifice *(PC)*
★★★★
Did you get a PC graphics card for Christmas? If so, buy *Sacrifice* now. Appearance-wise it's fantastic, and the landscapes and characters – there are over 50 baddies – are among the best yet seen on the PC. You, however, play a wizard, undertaking tasks for five warring deities; and while the first-person action is great, the game soon becomes repetitive and lacks true longevity.
www.sacrifice.net *Not an impressive site at all. But its saving grace is the free demo to download.*



The race to the head of the pension queue grew more fierce each week

WORDS: SHAUN MARIN

GAME OF THE MONTH

Shenmue *(Dreamcast)*
thenet ★★★★★ AWARD
Didn't get a PS2 for Christmas? Well dry those tears, *Shenmue* has arrived for the Dreamcast – and it's stunning. This massive single-player game incorporates role-playing, fighting and adventure in a way the *Final Fantasy* series can only dream of. You're a young man after revenge, roaming the 3D homeland of Ryu, talking to people and playing full versions of classic games while you argue with yourself about which is better: the gameplay or the graphics. It comes on four discs, and will keep you enthralled until PS2s are selling for £100 less than they currently are.
www.sega.com/sega/game/shenmue_launch.jhtml ★★★★★
The game's visuals are hard to live up to, but this site has a fair stab at it. Well-presented and comprehensive.

fantastic games

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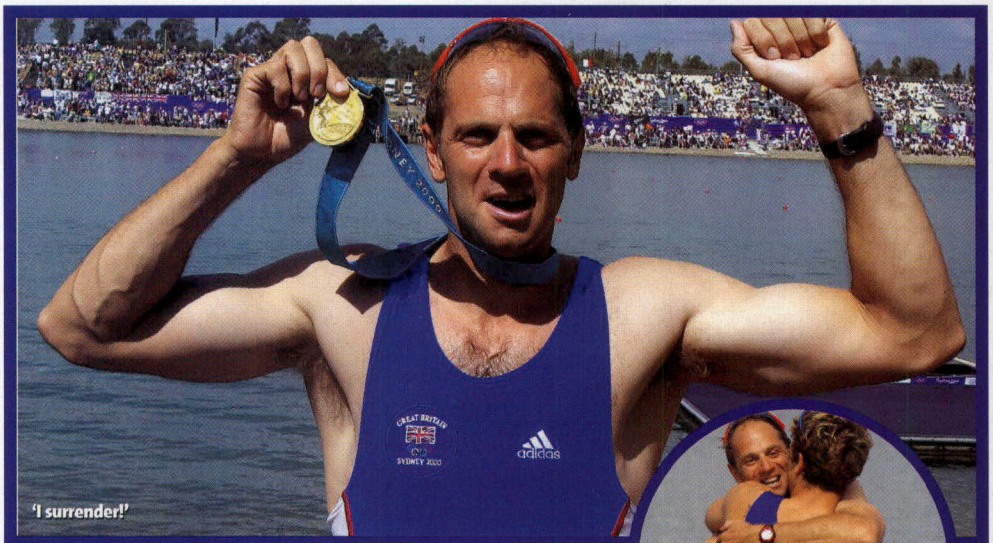
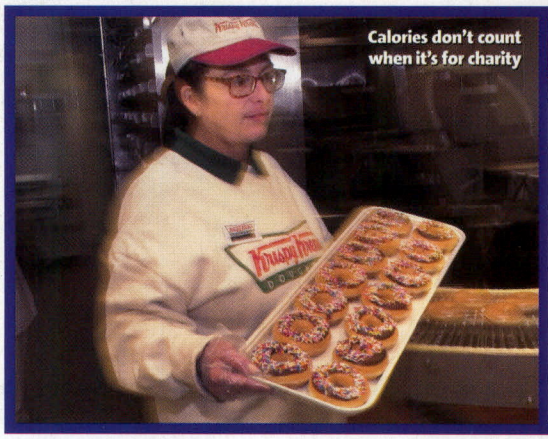
freeloader.com


'I surrender!'

16 All-round good sports

TUES **World Sport Awards, 16 January**

The sports industry's answer to the Oscars holds its second star-studded awards ceremony for sportsmen and woman. There are nine categories, with 75 outstanding athletes in with a chance. A jury (including legends such as Pele, Don Fraser, Alain Prost and Carl Lewis) decides on the list of candidates, and winners are voted for by sports journalists around the world as well as people visiting the Web site. Britain's hopefuls are rower Steven Redgrave, footballer David Beckham, longjumper Jonathan Edwards, boxer Lennox Lewis and mountain runner Angela Mudge. Angela might not be a household name, but she won the World Trophy for mountain running and is nominated thanks to a new category for extreme sports. ***www.world-sports-awards.tv***


Calories don't count when it's for charity

3-10 National Doughnut Week

WED-WED **National Doughnut Week, 3-10 January**

It may sound like a joke festival that Homer Simpson would organise so he could scoff bread-based delights, but it is actually an annual fundraiser for Save the Children. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, bakeries across the land will be making a donation for every doughnut they sell during the event. And for that 'celebrity' element, TV chef Ainsley Harriott has pledged his support to the project. ***www.savethechildren.org.uk/whatnew/doughnuts.html***

'And it contains *tobacco*, right?'

JANUARY 3-FEBRUARY 1

JAN 3 WEDNESDAY — Eskimos celebrate Blubber Day ***www.greenpeaceusa.org/save/alerts/whalepetition.htm***

4 THUR — Squash British Open ***www.britishopensquash.com*** International Boat Show, Earls Court ***www.bigblue.org.uk/html/boatshowlondon.cfm***

5 FRI — Vinnie Jones, 36 ***www.fansites.com/vinnie_jones.html*** Marilyn Manson, 31 ***www.marilynmanson.net***

6 SAT — Rowan Atkinson, 45 ***www.hsn.dk /rowan*** Bill Wyman leaves the Rolling Stones in 1993 ***www.stones.com***

7 SUN — Nicolas Cage, 37 ***www.cage-cave.avalon.hr***

13 SAT — London International Festival of Mime ***www.mimefest.co.uk*** Snooker's Nations Cup at the Hexagon, Reading ***www.snooker.forceg.co.uk***

14 SUN — *The Simpsons* premieres on US TV in 1990 ***www.snpp.com*** Faye Dunaway, 60 ***www.filmsite.org/bonn.html***

15 MON — Australian Open Tennis Championships ***www.ausopen.org*** Pete Waterman, 54 ***www.pwl-empire.com***

16 TUE — Sade, 41 ***www.sadeonline.com*** London Art Week kicks off in Islington ***www.londonart.co.uk***

17 WED — Jim Carrey, 39 ***www.jimcarreyonline.com*** British Museum opened in 1759 ***www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk***

23 TUES — Whitbread Book Awards ***www.whitbread-bookawards.co.uk*** Rutger Hauer, 57 ***www.rutgerhauer.com***

24 WED — Vic Reeves, 42 ***www.come.to/vicandbob*** Chinese New Year ***www.new-year.co.uk/chinese***

25 THURS — Jonathan Woodgate and Lee Bowyer in court in Hull ***www.lufc.co.uk*** David Ginola, 34 ***www.ginola.net***

26 FRI — Charles Manson convicted of murder in 1971 ***www.atwa.com*** Ellen DeGeneres, 43 ***www.hamline.edu/~drhagel/EllenHome.html***

27 SAT — Bridget Fonda, 37 ***www.geocities.com/Hollywood/6127*** Lenin placed in Mausoleum in Red Square in 1924 ***www.tampere.fi/culture/lenin/leninat.htm***

WORDS: MATT CHAPMAN, JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: PA, ONLINE USA

17 WED Pipe Smoker of the Year

The prestigious Pipesmoker of the Year award has been around for the past 35 years, thanks to our friends at The Pipesmokers' Council. The rules are simple: apart from being a public personality, the nominee must smoke and love the pipe. The winner receives a gold mounted pipe which they get to keep for a year, plus a one-off 'Personality Pipe' crafted especially for them. Last year's winner was actor Joss Ackland, and his pipe was in the shape of a clapperboard and camera. There has never been a female winner of the competition, but whether that is down to sexism or just the fact that women are unlikely to smoke a pipe is unknown.

www.pipesmokerscouncil.org

8 MON Elvis Presley born, 1935 ***www.elvis-presley.com***

First soup kitchens opened for the poor in London in 1800 ***www.salvationarmy.org***

9 TUE Lee Van Cleef, 76 ***members.aol.com/VanCleefed***

Anthony Eden resigns as Prime Minister in 1957 ***www.number-10.gov.uk***

10 WED Muslim holy week of Ramadan begins ***www.islaam.com/ramadan***

Rod Stewart, 56 ***www.rodstewartlive.com***

11 THUR Mary J Blige, 30 ***www.mjblige.com***

First recorded lottery drawn at St Paul's Cathedral in 1569 ***www.lotteryshop.com/uk/index.htm***

12 FRI Kirstie Alley, 46 ***jnine.terrashare.com/kirstie.htm***

First episode of *Dynasty* in 1981 ***stianp.freeservers.com***

18 THUR Jane Horrocks, 37 ***freespace.virgin.net/colin.kerr/little.htm***

Peter Beardsley, 40 ***www.nufc.co.uk/history/pastx.htm***

19 FRI Mike Reid, 61 ***www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Stadium/1123***

Tour de France bicycle race first announced in 1903 ***www.letour.fr***

20 SAT Buzz Aldrin, 71 ***www.buzzaldrin.com***

First English Parliament called to session in 1265 ***www.renaissancemagazine.com***

21 SUN Emma Bunton, 25 ***www.emma-lee-bunton.com***

22 MON Stan Collymore, 30 ***www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk***

Nigel Benn, 37 ***www.ipcress.com/writer/boxing.html***

28 SUN Heather Graham, 31 ***hem.passagen.se/indish/heather.htm***

29 MON Corrs concert for The Prince's Trust at the Albert Hall ***www.corrsonline.com***

Tony Blackburn, 58 ***www.off-shoreradio.co.uk/djsb.htm#blackb***

30 TUES Bloody Sunday shootings, Derry, 1972 ***www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.uk***

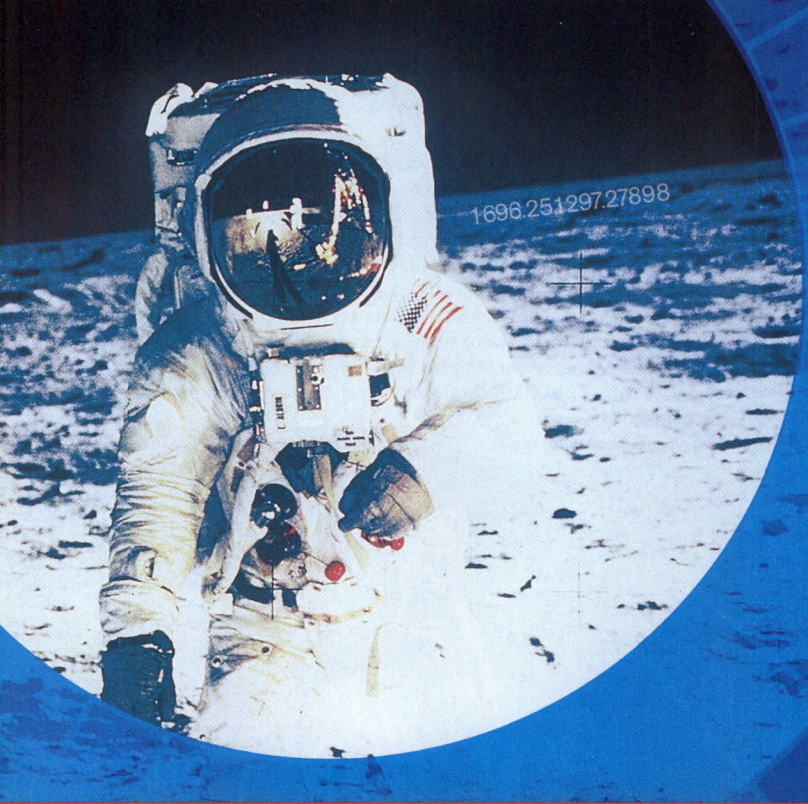
Gene Hackman, 70 ***www.149.pair.com/marilynn/hackman.htm***

31 WED Bafta nominations unveiled ***www.bafta.org***

John Lydon, 45 ***www.john-lydon.com***

FEB 1 THURS Sherilyn Fenn, 36 ***www.glassplanet.com/fenn***

TV-am begins broadcasting in 1983 ***www.cjetech.co.uk/tvam***



MAGIC MOMENTS

Our business is to serve you

Magic Moments Internet Plc

MISSION CRITICAL.

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #2
20.07.1969 Man's first step on the moon.

When Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon it was undoubtedly one of man's greatest moments. But he didn't do it alone. A huge team of the world's top scientists and technicians was totally focused on ensuring the success of that critical mission.

At Magic Moments our team of consultants is just as dedicated to ensuring your success and the effectiveness of your web presence. So whether you're planning a simple web site or complex mission-critical e-commerce applications, you'll be pleased you talked to Magic Moments. Through our own network backed-up with the most sophisticated resources, we provide comprehensive support to many of the best known names in business with full 24/7 technical support by telephone.

Listed below are just some of the products and services we currently offer, at prices that reflect real value for money. For more details visit our web site or give us a call.

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Linux OS, Apache Web server, InterBase SQL database, RAID1 (disk mirroring), and more.

The Cobalt RaQ4 is the ideal platform for deploying business critical applications that have high requirements for reliability.

FROM JUST £59pm!*

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We have assessed hundreds of products on the market to bring you the very best in their field. Prices for shopping cart solutions start at just **£199**, plus you can enjoy preferred rates on our hosting packages when you order any of the recommended shopping cart and payment solutions through us. SSL options are also available from **£65pa**.

Visit our web site to view demos of the shopping cart solutions or call us now for more information.

* Monthly equivalent based on a three year advance payment. All trademarks and registered trademarks acknowledged. Prices exclude VAT unless otherwise stated.

Send your letters to: Inbox, *the net*, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE or email us at ***inbox@thenetnow.co.uk***

Dear thenet,

In your ISP round-up in December, you state that most provide space where we can store Web pages. I'd like to use Microsoft Frontpage to create my site (a lot of inexperienced Web designers are in this position). I'm using Demon and have checked AOL – both of them large ISPs – and neither provide support for Frontpage. Should I change my Web design software, or find another ISP?

David Riddell
via email

*Many ISPs don't support Frontpage, especially if they're sworn enemies of Microsoft, like AOL. Direct Connection (**www.dircon.net**) however, does. Alternatively, if you don't want to move ISPs and you can't bear to give up Frontpage, use the software to build a site on your desktop, then cut and paste the raw HTML into blank pages.*

AOL: no fan of Frontpage

READER'S LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear thenet,

Like many of your readers, I have experimented with unmetered services. Sadly, CallNeto800 is no more, and I lost money on EzeSurf which crashed as soon as I joined! However, I recently discovered a site which compares all the unmetered ISPs and, more importantly, contains the comments and ratings of users (***www.o8whatever.com***). One can then make an informed decision. The more people use a site and contribute their experiences, the more power we, the users, have to determine the way that unmetered use of the Internet is going.

Constantine de Goguel
London SW17

The earliest modems were, in fact, androids

Dear thenet,

I got a computer three months ago and did not have a clue about the Internet, so I bought your magazine to help me out. My biggest problem was choosing an ISP. I knew I would be online a lot initially, so to avoid a fright when my next phone bill came through the door I decided to go for a flat-rate subscription. After studying your ISP listings, I decided to go with Direct Connection at £13.50 a month and the prospect of no higher a phone bill than normal.

I was very pleased with this decision, as I got a very fast connection and all the operators were very helpful. Then, three weeks later, just to reassure myself, I called to check that my bill would be unaffected. I couldn't believe it when they told me that a local phone rate would apply! I cancelled immediately.

I'm very angry with you, because not only did I have to pay £13.50 for those three weeks, but I also managed to spend an extra £40 on top of my usual phone bill.

I now pay AOL £14.99 a month for a proper flat-rate subscription, an excellent service and all the free advice I could ever imagine. This is all I was looking for in the first place.

Iain Rorison
via email

We're sorry you feel you were misled, but it stated quite clearly in our pages that Direct Connection's fine service cost £13.50 a month. However, to make things even clearer, we've revamped our ISP pages: see the results for yourself on pages 134 to 137.

Dear thenet,

What's the best place to start looking for a domain supplier offering .org and .com Web addresses? I intend to set up a Web page for a Dublin branch of an international charity. How much would we expect to pay?

Anthony Coogan
via email

*Domain names are regulated by ICANN: there's a list of accredited companies able to register an address for you at **www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html**. Expect to pay around £10 a year – but shop around.*

Dear thenet,

What are the top 10 UK-based search engines?

Scott Cameron, via email

*Go to **www.philb.com/ukengine.htm** for a top nine, or if you want to make your own comparisons there's a listing of 60 UK-based engines at **www.twics.com/~takakuwa/search/uk.html**. Last but not least, Find UK allows you to search 20 UK sites from a single page. Their excellent site is at **www.find-uk.co.uk**.*

A READER RANTS

We give you the space, you get to sound off!

Highway to Hell

MP3 files in four minutes, the ads say. Keep access to your telephone line while the kids use the Internet, they boast. Yet if my recent experience of BT Home Highway is anything to go by, you'll end up with no telephone line and kids who have yet to see the Net after six weeks of waiting.

I call and order the service. BT say they'll first need to complete a survey of our line. Fine, I say, and with a few weeks a letter arrives stating that the survey was satisfactory, but I'd need to change telephone numbers. They would advise me of my new number 'soon'.

Then friends begin telling us that our old phone number is unobtainable. I call the BT residential fault line, who tell me that everything's fine... 'but you appear to have Home Highway, sir'. No, I say, I'm getting it installed. 'Oh,' they say, 'well anyway, we can't find a fault. It's a mystery.'

Then the light dawns. I ring BT Home Highway, who at first insist that they've told me about my new number. Then, after a few awkward silences, they admit that they haven't. I'm finally told I've got a new telephone number after three hours of chasing.

Still, cheer up – Home Highway's being installed in a week. In the meantime, I buy an ISDN adaptor for my Mac G3 laptop (£110), and install BT Internet (a process that in itself took three days – nobody at BT Internet seems to know if they're 128K/ISDN compatible or not).

The engineers arrive on time at 8.30am. One tells me that my telephone number is my old number. No, I say through gritted teeth, you've changed my number, and it's this. Oh, he says, and vanishes out to his van to fiddle with a laptop.

He re-emerges to explain that he could go ahead with the installation, but that there was no guarantee that it would work – and I may lose my new telephone number to boot.

At which point, I begin swearing. I suggest politely where they can insert their Home Highway.

If this is typical of BT's approach (and one of the helpdesk staff at Home Highway admitted that the installation process 'caused a few problems'), then give me a cable modem any day.

Matthew Shelley
via email

Is there something you want to get off your chest?
Write to us at inbox@thenetnow.co.uk

WINE FOR WORDS!

The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

Rouge & Blanc®
http://www.rouge-blanc.com

PICTURES: KOBAL, PA

TOOLED UP
Is your equipment the best on the market?

'CHAMPAGNE, GARÇON!'
Can you really make a fortune on the Net?

Faster, Better, Cheaper

Your 100 steps to a more wholesome, fulfilling Web experience

PICTURE: CORBIS

All trademarks acknowledged. fastbeat.com ltd. is an independent retailer

the fast way to top up your talktime

fastbeat.com

PAIR OF EARS
£7 million

PLANET EARTH
£7 million

US PRESIDENCY
£20,000

Q What do all these have in common?

A If you've got deep enough pockets they could have been yours on eBay

No19 EBAY www.ebay.com

If an itinerary of recent items placed for sale on the world's biggest and best-known auction site, eBay, is – as many claim – a useful way of taking the cultural temperature of Planet Earth, then things must be reaching boiling point.

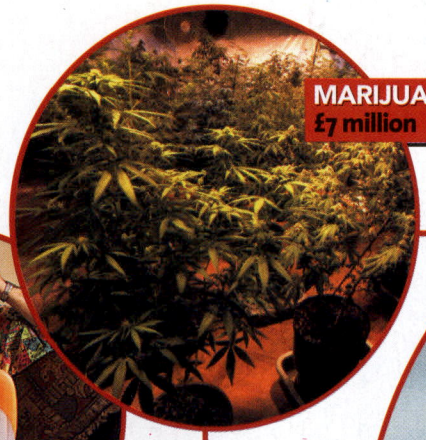
A grandma. A classroom full of small children. Various body parts, including a kidney and a human appendage. Mummified animals. Enough illegal items to keep the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms occupied for the rest of the millennium. Carol Vorderman.

None of it is, of course, strictly legal (which is why all the above were sadly removed shortly after being posted), but it remains a terrifying glimpse into the human psyche – not to mention an ongoing testament to what has rapidly become one of the most recognisable and well-regarded Web brands in the world.

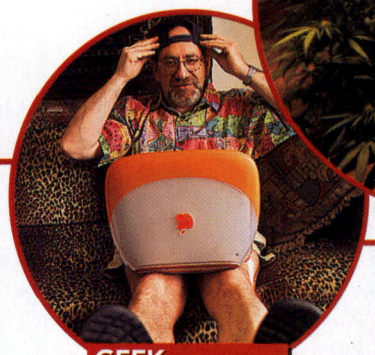
While these weird and wacky items might grab headlines for eBay, it can't explain the site's enduring success. The traffic figures speak for themselves: a daily average of 120 million page views, along with a total of 19 million registered users, places the online auction pioneer firmly into the 'supersite' category, jostling for superiority with the likes of MP3.com and Yahoo!

As ever, such lofty achievements were spawned from humble origins. eBay started life as the brainchild of Pierre Omidyar, whose wife is a devoted collector of Pez sweet dispensers. The budding Internet entrepreneur from California decided to investigate the possibility of setting up a dedicated site for other fans of ephemera to swap or sell items back in 1995. After witnessing the phenomenal interest in his fledgling site, Omidyar decided that eBay should become a commercial venture, taking a small cut of each transaction carried out.

Though Omidyar is keen to play up the socialism-in-action 'community' feel to the site, there's little doubting its commercial viability. 'The site has been profitable ever since it started,' says UK country manager Jennifer Mowat. 'We're just like a field for a car boot sale. We take a small percentage: we don't hold any of the merchan-



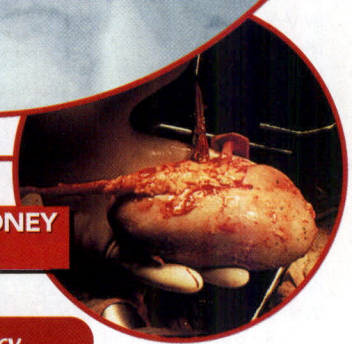
MARIJUANA
£7 million



GEEK
£31

BABY
£70,000

GRANDMOTHER
£700,000



HUMAN KIDNEY
£3.9 million

dise, so we have no overheads.' In the last quarter, the total value of items traded on eBay was a staggering £1.4 billion. Around 3.5 million auctions are held every day, and the company's share price has flourished amid the general Internet slump, allowing micro-sites to open in the UK, Germany, Australia, Japan, France or Italy, all of which are trouncing the many imitators on the market.

In those five fledgling years, eBay has become something of a Web institution – a way of life, indeed, for hoarders and collectors everywhere. Through the sheer volume of users and merchandise it boasts, the site has become a compelling treasure trove of e-commerce, ranging from the virtually useless to the needlessly extravagant. Each page is only a click away from another fascinating item; with a powerful search engine and built-in directory of items for sale, it's no surprise the site is the 'stickiest' in the UK, with the average user spending 172 minutes a month perusing its wares. 'They might come in first of all to look for a popular search term, but they get carried away looking at something else or they end up in one of the chat rooms discussing things with other users,' explains Mowat.

The eBay system set the standard for online auctioning and has yet to be bettered. Register for free, put an item up for sale and wait for the bids to fly in. Each accepted bid is a binding contract of sale, and added touches like automatic insurance on goods under £120, buyer and seller 'track records' to sort the bad traders from the good, and automatic bid increases for the absent buyer are innovations that have been widely imitated elsewhere.

Inevitably, though, such simplicity of use makes spoof sales ridiculously simple. With so many auctions taking place at any one time, it's near impossible for eBay to police everything placed on the site, so they rely instead on user tip-offs to remove the body parts, drugs *et al* from browsers' screens. Unfortunately, such joke auctions tend to have a snowball effect: within weeks of the original kidney offer being put online, 75 other users had offered offal of their own to the highest bidder.

Still, the future looks rosy for the e-auctioneers: their aim is no more complicated than to build on their existing user base and advance into new geographical territories. Refreshingly, despite the obvious benefits of adding a WAP element to their service (been gazumped at the last minute? Just get on the mobile!), the company is happy to remain PC-based for the time being. The trouble is, though, when you've offered to sell your soul (as one hardy user did recently), it's difficult to see what else you can possibly try and flog...

EBAY *Bidding for supremacy*

eBay: the world's cultural thermometer

WHAT IS IT? International auction site of repute, covering everything from modems to mummified household pets
LAUNCHED 1995
TRAFFIC 19 million registered users taking part in 3.5 million auctions a day. Average page views are 120 million a day
BASE San Jose, California
KEY FEATURES Searchable database of live auctions, specialist sites for most popular items, personalised pages for regular users listings their most wanted items, forums for discussing sales and collectibles

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS, ONLINE USA, NASA, LIAISON, IMAGEBANK, REX

SINGLE FILES

Single parents are no longer alone on the Net

PLANETONEPARENT

www.planetoneparent.com

Prince Charles, Ulrika Jonsson, Scary Spice, Bob Geldof...not the line-up for the tribute band from hell, but a mere sample of the 10.5 million lone parents in Britain.

And with marriage declining by 17 percent through the 90s, half of all marriages ending in divorce and one in three children being born out of wedlock, the already sizeable lone-parent contingent is increasing.

If anybody knows that, it's Yasuda Avery. The mother of two worked in partnership with her husband in a design company in Brighton until the relationship ended in November 1999, and Yasuda found herself with 'a whole heap of questions'.

'Where do I find out information? Is he supposed to pay me? Where am I going to meet new people?' Yasuda wondered. She spoke to an old friend and fellow lone parent, Louise Garratt. They both agreed it'd be great if there was just one place to go to find out all these things.

Even to a then-Net novice like Yasuda, the Web seemed the obvious place for such information. But a quick search revealed few online resources, 'so we thought, what the hell, let's go for it.' Corporate bank manager Louise left her job, and the partnership was born.

In fact, the pair managed to turn their relative lack of Internet experience into a positive. 'One thing we were clear about when we started was that we wanted to demystify the whole Web site process,' explains Yasuda. 'As non-Webby people we found a lot of it very confusing for the sake of it. And, being a designer, I was keen to get design across in a practical way.'

Which they did: 'We got all the info together, laid out on pieces of A4 paper in a ring binder, and wrote all the link instructions manually.' A chance encounter with local lad Dan of Beehive Design led to the current, easily-navigable, bright site.

Like lone parenting, it's not going to be easy, but Yasuda and Louise are determined to enjoy it. 'We have no advertising budget, but it's something that we want to grow with,' says Yasuda. 'We don't want to build it up and sell it on. As lone parents, it gives us the opportunity to be with our kids and at the same time hopefully survive financially while helping others.'

Their lack of Internet experience was to be turned into a positive

ANY QUESTIONS?

If so, Richard Barker's experts may well be able to help

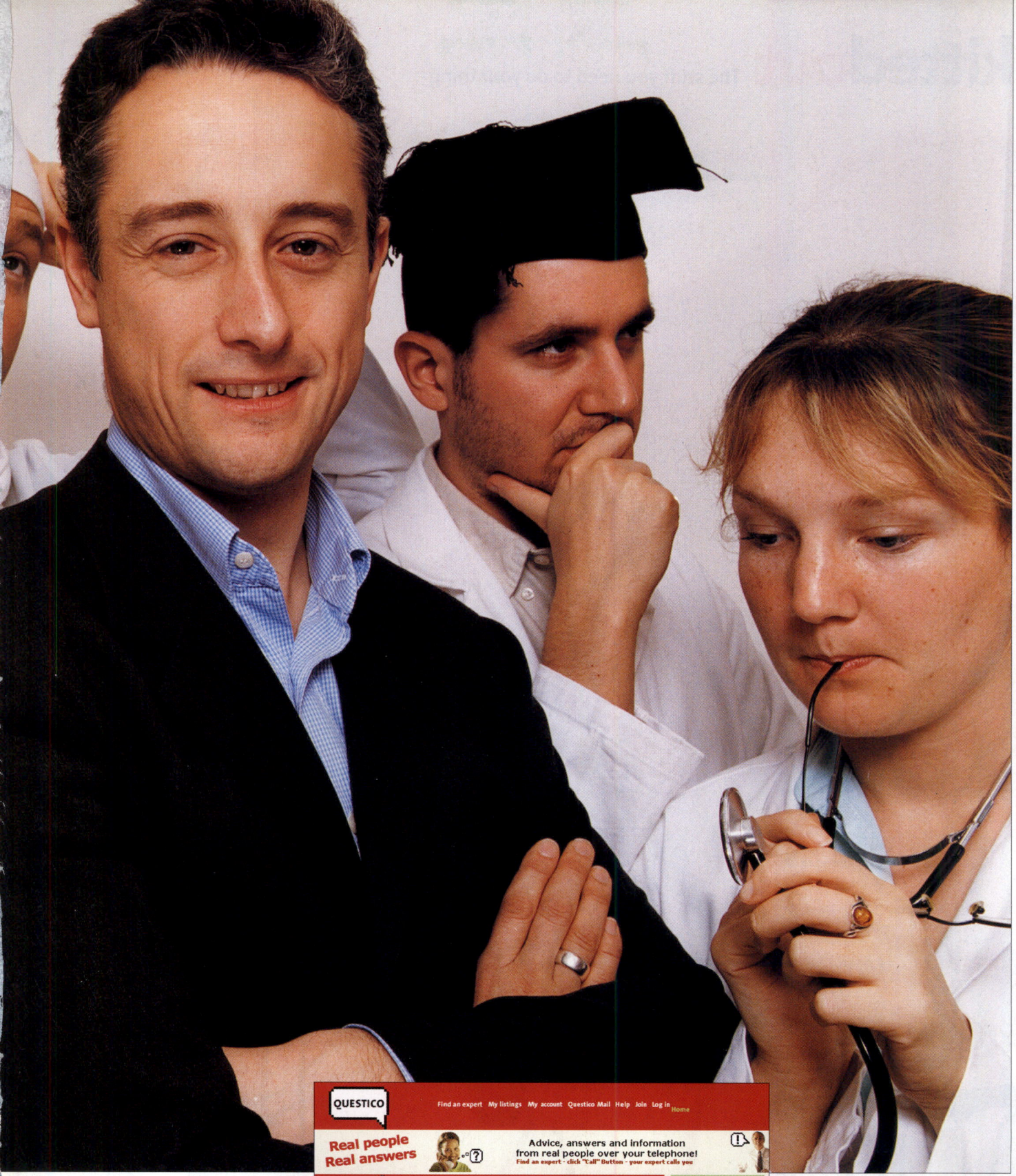
QUESTICO

www.questico.co.uk

Ask any of Chris Tarrant's victims and they'll tell you: it's good to phone a friend. Now imagine having a dozen expert friends in your phone book, from plumbers to computer engineers, all willing to offer their advice for the price of a pint. That's what Questico offers.

On its Web site are the numbers and credentials of 1,300 British brain-boxes, searchable by keyword. Simply register your credit card details, choose an expert, check the times they're available to call you back and their cost per minute, and away you go.

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON (PLANETONEPARENT); MATTHEW BINGHAM (QUESTICO); PICTURE: STEVE ORINO



'Every expert has his or her price,' explains managing director Richard Barker. 'The cheapest is 10p a minute and the most expensive £3, with the average around 80p.' You can also rate your expert for the benefit of fellow punters.

Coming up soon are email contact details, so you can follow up on your chat session, and as if that wasn't incentive enough during January all new users can get £3 worth of advice for nothing. 'We've spent five months approaching our experts,' says Richard. 'They have to be both very knowledgeable on their subjects and capable of presenting their expertise quickly, so saving you money. A typical chat only takes three-and-a-half minutes.' Currently the most popular 'experts' are astrologers, but there are all manner of more serious specialists waiting to take your call. 'For instance, we've got a rabbit bereavement counsellor,' says Richard. 'Pet-loss can be a massively traumatic experience for kids. Our specialist will counsel the child one-to-one.'

You could even offer the site the benefit of your own experience. 'Everybody's an expert in something,' explains Richard. 'We offer people a platform to monetise that knowledge.' And what would his own speciality be? 'How to set up a dotcom.'

kittedout The stuff you need to do your thing

G-STRING £10
www.undercoverexperience.co.uk

CAMISOLE £20
FRENCH KNICKERS £15
www.splendour.com

BRA £26
www.rigbyandpeller.co.uk

MATCHING SET from £15
www.splendour.com

ULTRABRA SET from £10 *www.smartbras.com*

BRA £25
G-STRING £15
www.splendour.com

BRA £25
FRENCH KNICKERS £20
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BRA £50
G-STRING £31
www.yzea.co.uk

BRA £25 BRIEFS £13 www.yzea.co.uk

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G-STRING £10
www.undercoverexperience.com

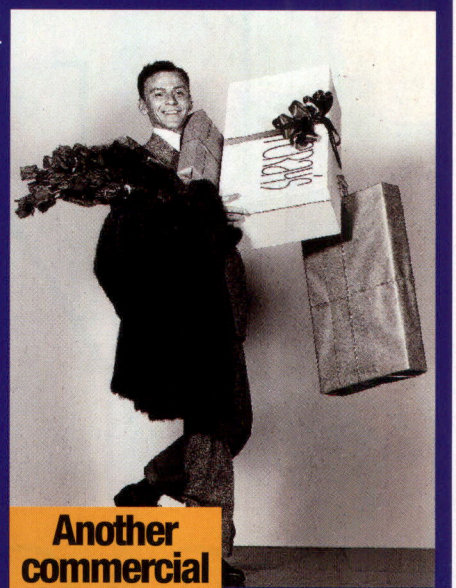
CAMISOLE SET from £8 www.marksandspencer.co.uk

BRA £21
BRIEFS £10
www.smartbras.com

BRA £20 www.undercoverexperience.co.uk

STORM IN A D-CUP

Looking for Valentine's Day gifts? Don't get your knickers in a twist – check out our guide



OK – that's Christmas over and done with for another year. The recovery – both financially *and* physically – from the stress and strain of the festive period is well under way. But just when you thought it was safe to go back into the shops, another commercial free-for-all raises its ugly head: Valentine's Day.

Snow and glitter have been replaced by silk and lace; red Santa hats and snowy Christmas cards have made way for red satin hearts and gooey declarations of lurve in the personals. There's no avoiding it – shopping for Valentine's Day gifts has to be done.

Another commercial free-for-all raises its ugly head: Valentine's Day

But no slogging round the shops for *you*, dear reader. Oh no. With *the net*'s help, buy gifts the easy way: online.

Buying gifts for a Valentine's present is relatively easy: lingerie is always a sure-fire bet for the virtual romeo. So take a leisurely virtual stroll around the myriad lingerie emporiums and choose with care. Take advantage of the anonymity that shopping on the Net affords – so no more purchasing the first bra and knickers you can grab.

Instead, take your time. Select from the best – gorgeous French lingerie from *www.yzea.co.uk*, or good old Marks and Spencer at *www.marksandspencer.co.uk* for a huge selection. Take a look at our glam pics for ideas – and not a pair of crotchless knickers among them.

HOW THE SITES COMPARE

YZEA *www.yzea.co.uk*
Recently launched here, this French site has a wide selection of exquisite lingerie, shown on 3D models to give an all-round view. ★★★★★

RIGBY & PELLER *www.rigbyandpeller.co.uk*
A well-designed site showing a selection of undies from the Queen's corsetiers – and if they're good enough for Liz... ★★★

VICTORIA'S SECRET *www.victoriassecret.com*
This large site is the online arm of the US high street lingerie chain, selling its rather lovely products at very reasonable prices. ★★★★★

MARKS & SPENCER *www.marksandspencer.co.uk*
Check out Marks' comprehensive site for a wide and rather fab selection of undies – not just white cotton knickers anymore, y'know. ★★★★

THE UNDERCOVER EXPERIENCE *www.undercoverexperience.co.uk*
This bills itself as the 'Ultimate on-line lingerie store', and it does indeed have an impressive range of underwear. ★★★

SPLENDOUR.COM *www.splendour.com*
An elegant, well-designed site offering a wide choice of undies from seductive satin numbers to practical cotton sets. ★★★★

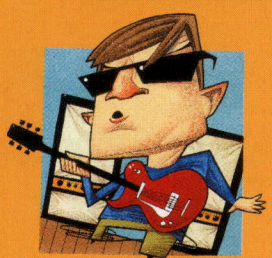
SMARTBRAS *www.smartbras.com*
Easy-to-navigate site with a nice range of undies to choose from. Prices are pretty good, too. ★★★

AGENT PROVOCATEUR *www.agentprovocateur.com*
The label's signature cheeky little numbers are available from the online shop; lingerie has never been so raunchy *and* classy... ★★★★

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT, KOBAL

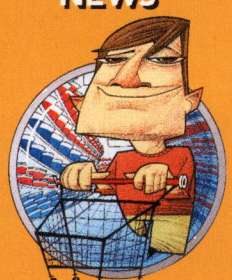
TRASH YOUR BOOKMARKS

There's more to the Web than your trusty old favourites. Start the New Year with a whole new surfing experience...



MUSIC

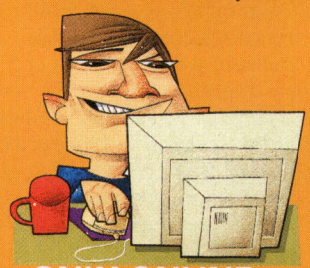
NEWS



SHOPPING

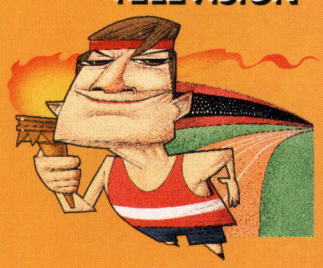
YOU THINK YOU KNOW THE Web. You want to buy something, play something, watch something, or maybe just catch up with the latest news. No problem: it's all safely stored in your list of bookmarks or favourites. Most of them probably came pre-loaded. And, after all, you're a serious Web user now. We don't blame you for not wanting to waste hours trawling through all the dross when you've already got everything you need at the click of a mouse. Better the devil you know, eh? It happens to us all in the end.

Here's what you do: delete all those bookmarks. That favourite e-zine, trash it; those trusty movie review sites, trash them; your safe old online TV listings, games site, movie mag – trash them all. Get out of your comfort zone, try something new, and find out what exciting new sites the Web has in store for you. Kick off those comfy slippers and dust down your dancing shoes. We've highlighted the sites to revitalise your flagging browser in a variety of vital categories, be they promising newcomers or undiscovered gems. We'll show you the old favourites you should have tried by now, and the hot shots we believe are worth watching over the next 12 months. Sit back and surf away for a whole new online experience...

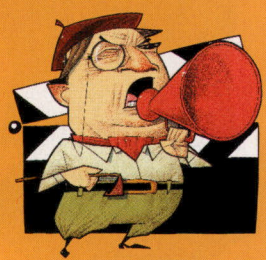


ONLY ONLINE

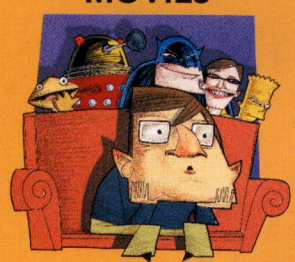
E-ZINES



SPORT



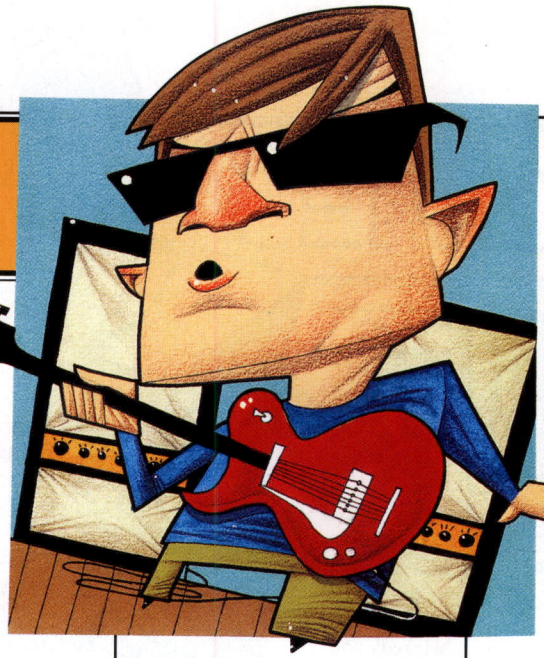
MOVIES



TELEVISION

WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY; ILLUSTRATIONS: KEVIN FEBRUARY; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

MUSIC



For news of the latest sounds try...

DOTMUSIC

With an excellent design and comprehensive coverage from Red Snapper to Madonna, this UK-based site has all the news and reviews, plus Webcasts of major events. Where Dotmusic really excels is with its special features, such as a live Webcam pointed at Ocean Colour Scene as they record their new album.

■ ***www.dotmusic.co.uk***

For a creative approach try...

DONE AND DUSTED

If you've got a fast connection and you want a supercharged music site that makes the most of the Internet's bells and whistles, switch to Done and Dusted, at entertainment site Switch2. Its coverage isn't as comprehensive as rivals', but it's a great looking site, full of news, festival coverage and multimedia.

cherry.switch2.net/

To keep up-to-date try...

NME

Britain's best-regarded music paper has made a successful transition online, regularly breaking the latest stories from all manner of musical genres and offering a whole host of exclusive Webcasts, competitions and community features.

■ ***www.nme.com***

For all that jazz try...

A GREAT DAY IN HARLEM

The homepage is a photo by Art Kane of 57 major jazz musicians together in Harlem one day in 1958. The photo is an image map: click on a group of faces to jump to a menu of names; choose one to find an artist bio, discography and links to their music. You can also explore jazz history by timeline, instrument or style. Ingenious.

■ ***www.harlem.org***

For classical try...

GRAMOPHONE

Whether you're a classical music aficionado wanting to know the merits of different recordings, or a neophyte trying to decide what turns you on, this is the ultimate classical music site. It hosts a fully- and easily- searchable database of over 25,000 CD reviews from the past 15 years, plus features and the latest news.

■ ***www.gramophone.co.uk***

If you need a break try...

GETSIGNED

Aspiring stars should check out attorney Ron's words of wisdom on copyright and management before signing on the dotted line. Featuring an impressive range of advice and features on just about everything to do with the music industry, it's also the place to go for gear reviews and inspirational success stories.

■ ***www.getsigned.com***

To find some new MP3s try...

PEOPLESOUND

Founded last year in the UK to help emerging artists and deliver high quality MP3 across all genres, the site plays host to thousands of hopefuls. There's a user-friendly beginner's guide, or just type in the name of your favourite band or artist and the search engine makes a suggestion. You can then listen to it on your RealPlayer, read the bio, buy the CD, or move on to the next suggestion.

■ ***www.peoplesound.com***

To hook up with a community of musos try...

THE INTERNET UNDERGROUND MUSIC ARCHIVE

IUMA was put together by the group Ugly Mugs to host their tracks *Cold Turd on a Paper Plate* and *Abracadaver* back in 1993. The site now plays host to thousands of bands of all genres. You can preview tracks with RealAudio, grab the MP3s and click through the links to visit artists' pages.

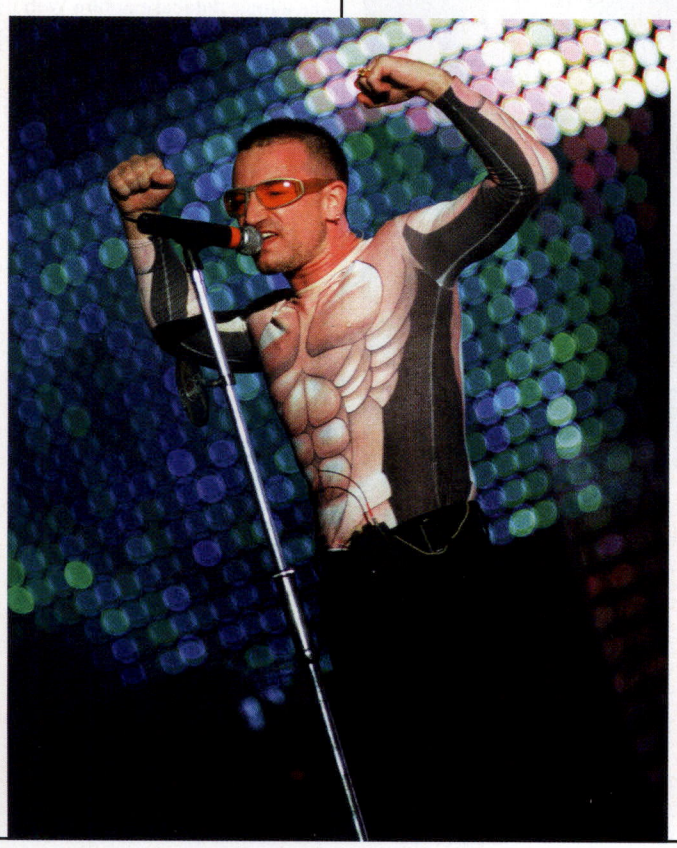
■ ***www.iuma.com/***

To find big name MP3s try...

LISTEN

This site launched in the wake of the better-known MP3.com with the aim of being the first to try to link all legal MP3s on the Web. Rather than going head-to-head against the music biz, it's done deals with just about everyone out there and now offers access to a vast range of MP3 and music videos. Fast, reliable and simple to use; rare qualities in the world of MP3.

■ ***www.listen.com***



HOT SHOTS

Classical Midi Archives Huge database of classical music
www.prs.net/ midi.html

Music 365 News and features
www.music365.co.uk

BBC Music Magazine
Gramophone's chief rival
www.bbcmusicmagazine.beeb.

OLD FAVOURITES

Napster
Highly publicised scourge of the record labels ***www.napster.com***

MP3.com
First of the big legal MP3 sites
www.mp3.com

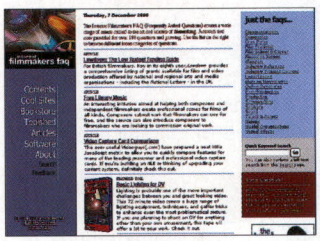
Rolling Stone
Huge music portal
www.rollingstone.com

The Ultimate Band List
Definite guide to music lists
www.ubl.com

WHERE NEXT?

MP3 is here to stay and the music giants are going to have to embrace it sooner or later. Bertelsmann has kind of got the idea, signing a deal with Napster, but the future will most probably see completely new ways of selling music. Fans will subscribe to bands they like, allowing them to download MP3s to their hearts content.

MOVIES



Want to make your own movie? Try...

FILMMAKING NET

This site has been called 'one of the most comprehensive databases of knowledge on filmmaking available anywhere'. No bells or whistles, just plenty of info, presented in a series of FAQs on everything from the technical aspects of lighting a film set to raising money to put your dreams on the screen.

■ ***www.filmmaking.net***

For trailers try...

THE TRAILER PARK

Get yourself a sneak glimpse of the next blockbuster, or enter the vault to indulge in some movie nostalgia with stills and movie clips from the greats of the silver screen. This is a one-stop-shop for trailers, previews and classic cinema moments from the big screen on the small screen. There are several hundred movies on this site, ranging from the latest obscure foreign art house short for the film buffs, to the most recent Disney film for the kids. Use it to pick a film to see, or browse for old favourites.

■ ***www.movie-trailers.com***

For the latest movie news and views try...

POPCORN

If you only bookmark one movie site, this is the one to choose. With news, reviews and a selection of the best trailers, it's the ultimate movie-goer's companion. Want to know what your favourite actor is up to, or fancy picking the brains of your favourite directors? Popcorn has it all. Special features allow you to chat with the likes of *The Exorcist* legend William Peter Blatty, or read the latest interview with such film legends as Woody Allen.

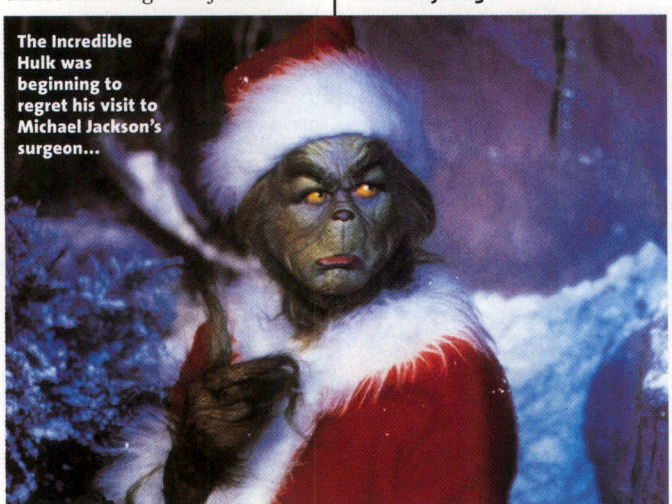
■ ***www.popcorn.co.uk***

For expert reviews try...

THE ONLINE FILM CRITICS SOCIETY

If you're tired of Dave at *Bloated* Mag telling you some movie is 'wicked', you might want to drop by here for a more informed opinion. Founded in 1997, the Online Film Critics Society is the 'premiere international organization of film critics who post their printed movie reviews exclusively or primarily online.' You'll find a list of recent films linking you to reviews by members in a wide variety of online film mags and journals alongside articles on everything from low culture teen horror flicks to high culture art house. These are reviews that count.

■ ***www.ofcs.org***



The Incredible Hulk was beginning to regret his visit to Michael Jackson's surgeon...

If you want the picture from the players try...

UNITED INTERNATIONAL PICTURES

One of the largest distributors of films in the world, UIP can offer you unparalleled access to the latest movies, so you don't have to spend hours guessing URLs anymore. This is an indispensable gateway to the Web sites of many current and upcoming releases. Effectively, it's a huge database of film Web sites from three major studios: Universal, Paramount and Dreamworks. Simply scroll through the pictures and leap to the official sites, or browse through the archives.

■ ***www.uip.com***

For insider knowledge try...

AIN'T IT COOL NEWS

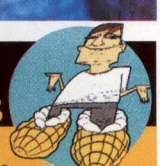
No punches pulled here. If you hurry over, there might still be time to vote in the 'butt-numb-athon' of the year, that much-hyped film that should have ended up on the cutting room floor. This is where you can find out about all that is cool within the film industry: scripts, casting, pre-production, production, post-production, test screenings, marketing and the release of the films. But Ain't It Cool's reputation is largely built on inside scoops on coming attractions. If you're keen to uncover the inside track on Hollywood, look no further.

■ ***www.aintitcool.com***

HOT SHOTS

Apple Trailers
More trailers from for the Apple Quicktime player
www.apple.com/trailers

British Film Institute
Moviemaking advice site with a particular emphasis on financing your movie
www.bfi.org.uk/makingmovies



OLD FAVOURITES

Yell
Reviews, pick of the top films, and a film finder
uk.yell.com/home

The Radio Times
Reliable reviews for films on TV, cinema, video and DVD
www.radiotimes.co.uk/film

The Internet Movie Database
The granddaddy of all movie sites: indispensable but predictable
www.imdb.com

TELEVISION

If you prefer your independents try...

THE INDEPENDENT FILM MAGAZINE

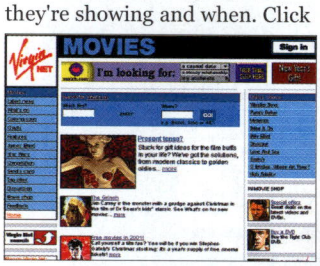
The Independent Film Magazine is a site for all the little filmmakers out there shooting on Super 8. Forget Hollywood for a while: low-budget, independent films are a rich and rewarding alternative to the tired and cliché ridden blockbusters – and there are more of them than ever before. There's a new issue of IF every Friday, so put your feet up at the weekend while you read profiles and interviews with up-and-coming directors, or click on 'Down in the Trenches' to read advice for aspiring film makers and reports from on set.

■ ***www.ifmagazine.com***

To find out what's on near you try...

VIRGIN NET'S MOVIES

Bored? No plans? How about catching a film? Well, you probably have no idea what's on. Not a problem; nip over to Virgin Net's movie page. Type your postcode into the box at the top of the screen and you'll get a list of cinemas near you, what they're showing and when. Click



on the various links to find out how to get to the cinema, or to read lively reviews of the movies.

■ ***www.virgin.net/movies***

WHERE NEXT?

Bandwidth, bandwidth, bandwidth. Until BT gets its act together with ADSL, sites like Movie Trailers, which are at the cutting edge of film delivery, will be unable to move on. Full-feature movies via the Web are already a realistic proposition. We're just waiting on the telcos to put the final piece into the jigsaw.

To find out what's happening in TV-land try...

WAVEGUIDE

Online in one form or another for an incredible 15 years, Waveguide is still only used by the lucky few in the know. It carries all the latest info on what's happening in TV and is updated daily. If you want to know the news behind the news, or which series are being commissioned, this one's a must.

■ ***www.waveguide.co.uk***

To find out what's on try...

DIGIGUIDE

Download the excellent 1.5mb DigiGuide to get TV listings on your desktop. The Smart Search feature allows you to quickly find programmes you like and Reminder can alert you to a programme you want to watch. Best of all, you can teach DigiGuide what you like and it will suggest programmes for you to switch on – and it's all free.

■ ***www.digiguide.co.uk***

For the best reviews try...

SCENEONE TV

The TV pages at entertainment supersite Sceneone provide you with up-to-the-minute expert reviews of the week's telly. Superbly presented, there are also TV listings, a chart of the top 10 programmes and lively forums where you can drop in and discuss the latest on Corrie, *Eastenders* and Brookie.

■ ***www.sceneone.co.uk/s1/tv***

For a spot of nostalgia try...

EPISODE GUIDES

If you've ever wondered what happened in episode seven, series one of the A-team in 1983, you need to get out more often. Failing that, point your browser at this huge database of TV series, where you'll find episode guides to hundreds of great US shows: *ER*, *Friends*, *Frasier* and *Ally McBeal*, to name but a few.

■ ***www.episodeguides.com***

One day, all fan sites will be this good

Corrie fans should try...

THE CORONATION STREET FANS WEBSITE

If you're addicted to the long-running northern soap, you won't be able to live without this information-packed site: episode guides, gossip and trivia, blasts from the past, and the place to meet other Corrie fans.

■ ***www.corrie.net***

Eastenders addicts should try...

EASTENDERS TRIVIA

With this cleverly-designed site, you click on a map of Albert Square to be transported to a fact-packed article with everything you ever wanted to know about everyone who's ever lived there and every dirty detail about their lives. Loads of links.

■ ***www.walford.net***

WHERE NEXT?

People buy into programmes, not channels, and the future is with the fan sites; the more viewers can tap into their favourite soap or sitcom, the happier they'll be. The future of TV listings lies with the convergence of TV and Internet. Nobody's got it right yet, but the online DigiGuide is far superior to anything the digital TV companies have on offer.

HOT SHOTS

Official Eastenders Site
Remember Dirty Den?
www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders

Official Coronation Street Site Check out cast members' video diaries
www.g-wizz.net/cs_40th

Official Brookside Site
Latest news on everyone's favourite scallies
www.channel4.com/entertainment/brookside

OLD FAVOURITES

BBC
Guides to the Beeb's programmes, plus plenty more besides
www.bbc.co.uk

TV Cream
A huge repository of long-forgotten tv classics, with added theme tunes
www.tv.cream.org

All you want from the Internet

Getting what you want from the Internet is important to you. So make sure the ISP you choose is the **right choice** for you and gives you total control. Over a million people have already discovered the benefits of accessing the Internet through **LineOne** and enjoy an award-winning service with superb content and plenty of extra features to make sure you get exactly what you want from the Internet quickly and easily.

- **Fast and reliable service**
  even better when you're connected you stay connected!
- **No subscription fee**
  all you pay for is your Internet calls as and when you connect
- **Get straight to what you want**
  a wide variety of content organised into easy to access categories
- **Best of the web**
  our powerful search engine and Best of the Web directory bring you the best of the Web
- **A great deal**
  fantastic shopping offers and exclusive member discounts!
- **24 hour online support**
  need help? email our helpdesk free at support@lineone.net

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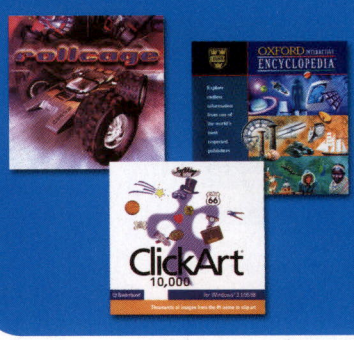


***New Offer* Unlimited Off-peak Internet Calls!**

* With our optional **LineOne** SurfTime Internet calls package you can get unlimited off-peak Internet calls. Plus your peak time calls will be charged at just 1p per minute (BT standard peak rate 4p). Just pay £9.99 per month through your BT phone bill. For more details go to www.lineone.net/surftime

* Minimum contract terms and conditions apply. Subject to availability. BT line required. Off-peak is Mon-Fri 6pm – 8am and all weekend

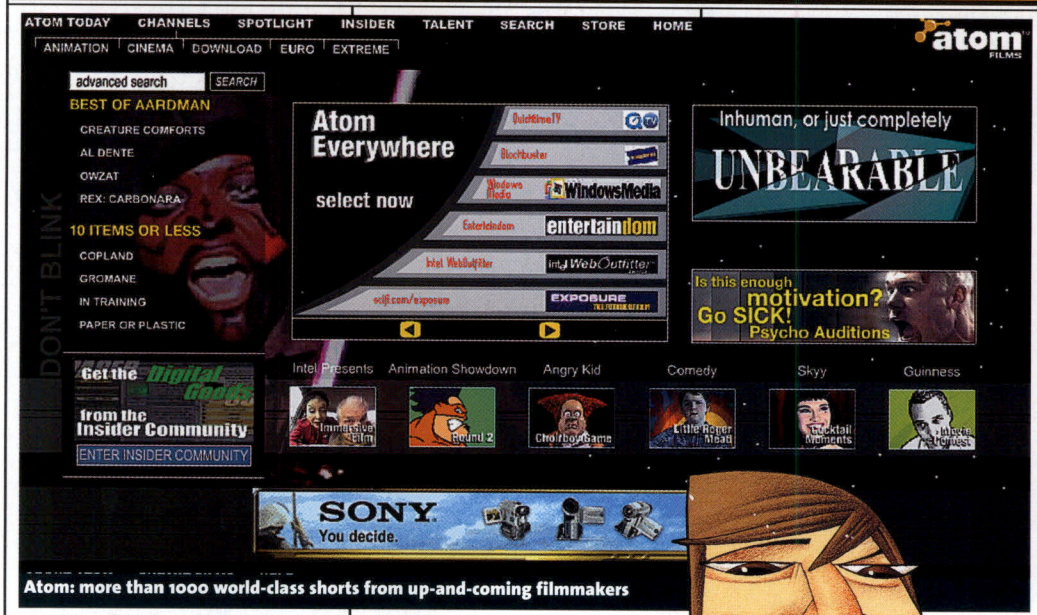
FOR YOUR FREE INTERNET START-UP PACK CALL

0800 111 210

LINE ONE

www.lineone.net

ONLY ONLINE



Atom: more than 1000 world-class shorts from up-and-coming filmmakers

For voyeurism try...

CAMVILLE

Is it voyeurism, anthropology or a healthy sense of community that explains why thousands of people spend their lives in front of video cameras, and thousands of others watch them? Here's a massive list of Webcams, along with Webcam news and tips on how to set up your cam. You haven't experienced the power of the Web on people's lives until you've been to Camville.

■ ***www.camville.com***

To kick ass online try...

WIREPLAY

There comes a time when thrashing a computer player is just way too easy. What's more, you can't raise much of a reaction from your PC when you gloat at it. Find some human opponents at Wireplay, a top free online gaming service with a massive list of supported games. Includes the lowdown on how to get started and Wireplay software to download.

■ ***www.gameplay.com/wireplay***

To tune in try...

RUSH LIMBAUGH

Sample Internet radio at the deep end with live broadcasts of the legendary Clinton-bashing Rush Limbaugh, one of the most popular talk-radio hosts in the US. He's offensive, outspoken, right wing, provocative and hilarious. You can listen to his live show or play audio clips of Rush pontificating on the issue of the moment. Not for the faint hearted, his motto is: 'The battle against liberalism never ends'.

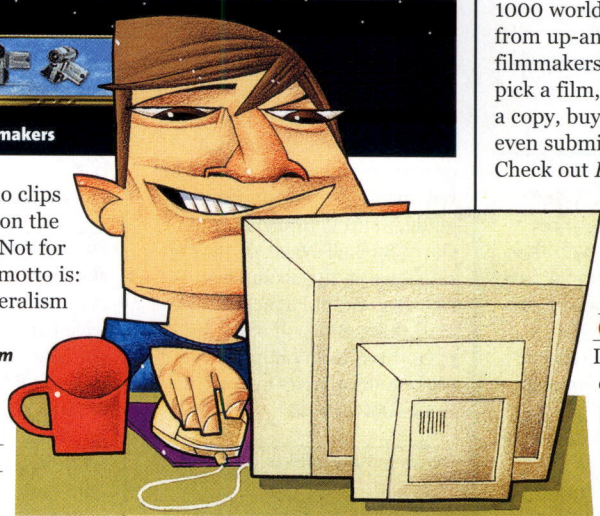
■ ***www.rushlimbaugh.com***

To scan the airwaves try...

RADIO LOCATOR

Simplicity itself: a master list of radio stations around the world, online and offline (about 10,000 with a dozen added every week). Use the search engine to find stations by location and a table of broadcasters appears. A little icon indicates whether or not they are available online: many aren't, but this is still the most comprehensive list of Internet radio stations on the Web.

■ ***wmbr.mit.edu/stations/list***

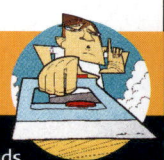


For cutting edge Web design try...

STUDIO AKA

A truly brilliant example of the wonders you can work with Shockwave. You'll need Version 8 to enter the site hosted by aka Pizazz, a London-based animation and mixed media company. The design is actually very simple, yet an incredibly effective parade of examples of their work.

■ ***www.studioaka.co.uk***



HOT SHOTS

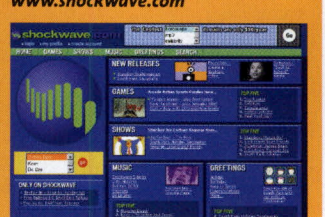
Cam Central
Home to thousands of cam fanatics
www.camcentral.com

Gameplay
Fast growing arena for online clashes ***www.gameplay.com***

Spinner
Download an Internet radio and listen to 150 music channels playing a cycle of songs
www.spinner.com

OLD FAVOURITES

Shockwave
Cutting-edge Web design
www.shockwave.com



To get animated try...

MACHINIMA

Wow! A huge library of free animated films made with computer-generated graphics, but using technology that works on a desktop PC, so feature length films can be made for a tiny fraction of the cost of *Antz* or *Toy Story*; and what's more they can be distributed over the Internet and watched in real time. Go watch.

■ ***www.machinima.com***

For original movies try...

ATOM FILMS

This is a seriously impressive acre of Web space. Atom is a highly worthwhile project as well as a Web site, hosting over 1000 world-class short films from up-and-coming filmmakers. It works like this: pick a film, watch it, and if want a copy, buy the DVD. You can even submit your own movies. Check out *Bikini Bandits* and *The Time Machine* for inspiration.

■ ***www.atomfilms.com***

If you feel creative try...

GET OUT THERE

If want to sample new creatives or promote your own efforts, BT's getoutthere has everything you need. In the music zone, artists upload MP3s of their tunes and surfers download them for free. The more downloads, the higher an artist climbs up the chart. In the film zone, filmmakers upload their films for a monthly competition and BT promises to promote the best ones through a network of movers and shakers. Writing and photography zones are coming soon.

■ ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***

WHERE NEXT?

The future of Web-specific technologies depends on bandwidth. Nobody clicks on a movie download or streaming audio and really expects it to work or download before bedtime. Once the hardware is in place, sites like Atom Films and Machinima will come into their own, and our entertainment options will get ever richer. And once the ISPs and BT thrash out a pricing structure for online access that works (ie, is free), we'll be glued to our plasma monitors (at least as soon as the prices come down).

NEWS

To stay wired try...

THE REGISTER

The Register is the largest and busiest IT website in the UK, generating over six million page impressions a month. Largely text-based with big bold headlines, navigation is a doddle, and there's something to appeal to everyone.

■ ***www.theregister.co.uk***

For breaking news try...

MY YAHOO! NEWS TICKER

My Yahoo! is one of the more popular customisable Web sites on the Internet. Sign-up for free, pick your preferences and every time you visit the page it'll display the latest news tailored to your interests. You can also download a My Yahoo! news ticker that sits on your desktop and keeps you abreast of the latest information on stocks, news, sports scores and weather, all based on your My Yahoo! preferences.

■ ***uk.my.yahoo.com/ticker***

For an international perspective try...

THE NEW YORK TIMES

For the range of its coverage and the quality of its writers, The New York Times on the Web is hard to top. Not only does the Web edition reproduce the entire print version, but also offers unique content. The recently-launched Abuzz forums cover over 100 subjects, from travel to trivia, and parenting to politics. When you ask a question or start a discussion, Abuzz's technology sends it to the members most likely to know the answers.

■ ***www.nytimes.com***

For financial news try...

REUTERS

Leading news wire service Reuters is renowned for its coverage of financial and business news. The site has a no-nonsense, very clean design; no gimmicks, or extraneous graphics. The emphasis is on quick and easy access to key information under a variety of headings. There's also a breaking news section, and a search engine that puts stock market quotes at your fingertips.

■ ***www.reuters.com***

For a spot of light relief try...

THE SUN

Streets ahead of the opposition, the Currant Bun online just oozes cheeriness with its bright red and yellow layout. For a TV guide, point your browser at Garry Bushell's face, or pick up relationship tips from Dear Deirdre. And if Page 3 is more your thing, spin-off site page3.com is an online phenomenon in its own right.

■ ***www.thesun.co.uk***

For something different try...

THE FORTEAN TIMES

Founded in 1973, the *Fortean Times* has always taken weirdness very seriously; intelligent speculation about the unexplained rather than the simply bizarre. The online edition includes selected articles from the news-stand magazine, plus a breaking news section, based on reports filed by readers.

■ ***www.forteantimes.com***

For a spot of culture try...

ARTS AND LETTERS DAILY

A must for culture vultures, this excellent compilation of links to the best book reviews, 'think pieces' and features in the world's press is updated daily. Launched by US academic Denis Dutton, the site has achieved cult status around the world with its mission to extract the 'precious nuggets of real content' to be found on the Web.

■ ***www.cybereditions.com/aldaily***

For an individual take on events try...

THE DRUDGE REPORT

The eponymous Drudge Report shot to notoriety in January 1998 when Hollywood gossip-mongerer Matt Drudge broke the Monica Lewinsky story: the first time the Internet beat the traditional press to a major new story. Today, his site allegedly receives a staggering three million hits a day, even though it's largely a library of links to other news sources, alongside Drudge's personal selection of articles.

■ ***www.drudgereport.com***

To make your own newspaper try...

MOREOVER

Register for free at Moreover, and you can design a newspaper of your very own. Moreover culls stories from more than 1500 of the best-informed Internet publications then sorts them into 300 different news 'feeds', such as Formula One updates, Internet news, gardening, space exploration... Decide which feeds you're interested in, how many headlines you want and in what order. You've now created an online newspaper just for you, and it's updated every 15 minutes.

■ ***w.moreover.com***

HOT SHOTS

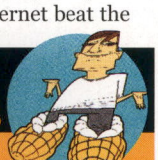
One World
Human rights issues
www.oneworld.net

Alert
Disaster reports
www.alertnet.org

New Scientist
Tomorrow's news today
www.newscientist.com

Yahoo
The big stories of the moment
uk.fc.yahoo.com

OLD FAVOURITES



CNN
Ted Turner's monster news organisation has everything
www.cnn.com

BBC News
Everyone's favourite Auntie has an excellent news-gathering reputation ***News.bbc.co.uk***

The Guardian Online
Stylish site that beats a different drum to the other broadsheets
www.guardian.co.uk

WHERE NEXT?

New media pundits have been talking about the 'Daily Me', the ultimate tailor-made news service, for years, and finally the Web has delivered. Moreover taps so many sources with its intelligent software you need never miss the news that's important. Yet it's unlikely to mean the end of more traditional news services; people still want variety, and stories they didn't even know they wanted to read. In the future, traditional online news providers are likely to take the success of Ananova on board and give their sites a little more personality.

web sight

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SHOPPING

To maximise buying power try...

LETSBUYIT

A massive ad campaign means everyone must have heard of Letsbuyit by now, but the complexity of the system can be off-putting at first glance. It's actually quite simple and a few minutes with the beginner's guide should sort you out. You make savings by entering a 'co-buy' for the stuff on offer, and the more people who join the co-buy the cheaper it gets until it reaches the best price or the time-limit runs out. You can opt to buy at the current price when the sale ends or only at the best price. Look out for multi-country co-buys which almost always attract enough punters to get the best price.

■ ***www.letsbuyit.com***

For a one-stop-shop try...

DEALTIME

Launched off the back of a very successful US site in December last year, this price comparison site is lagging a little behind its parent in terms of the range of products for comparison, but it's expanding rapidly and is by far the best of its kind for speed and reliability. DealTime is unique among price comparisons in that once you register, you can order all your goods and track your orders directly from the site.

■ ***www.dealtime.co.uk***

To compare prices try...

KELKOO

Recent research by Kelkoo found that the UK's e-consumers could be a whopping £82 million out of pocket if they don't shop more wisely. Now the UK's highest-profile price comparison site, it should stop you paying over the odds. It lacks the range of products on DealTime, but is more independent of the retailers, easy to use and finds the best deals most of the time.

■ ***www.kelkoo.com***

For must-have gadgets try...

FIREBOX

'Where men buy stuff' says the slogan. And probably quite a few boys as well. If you're kitting out your bachelor pad or just mad about gadgets and boys' toys, make this a regular port of call. If you think you're more of a man than a boy and have a wallet to match your ego you'll want to skip the radio-controlled toys and order the V24 Offshore Racing Powerboat, a snip at £36,000.

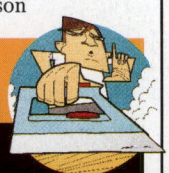
■ ***www.firebox.com***

For unbeatable deals on CD and DVDs try...

PLAY247

How they do it, nobody knows. Rival site DVDPlus claims to be selling its stock at cost, but still can't beat the prices at Play247. This has been far and away the cheapest site for audio and video goodies for the last 12 months. No messing, it's a cinch. Click on the tab at the top of the screen to select your poison (and for DVDs, your region) then search or browse the catalogue or take a look at the forthcoming releases to get in an early order.

■ ***www.play247.com***



HOT SHOTS

Price Challenge

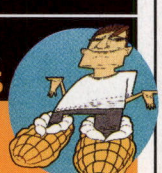
A simple but excellent site that points you at the shopping sites with the best deals

www.pricechallenge.co.uk

Simply Computers

Almost certainly the best site for computer hardware

www.simply.co.uk



OLD FAVOURITES

Shopsmart

Reviews, price comparison, store directory

uk.shopsmart.com

Jungle

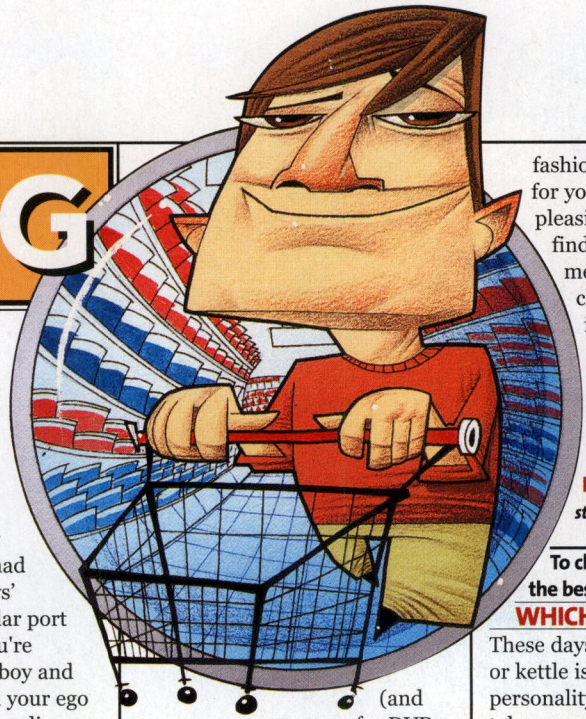
Games, music, video/DVD and computers

www.jungle.com

Amazon

Online retailing at its best. Often have the best prices, too

www.amazon.co.uk



To find something that's up your street try...

STREETS ONLINE

There are four 'streets': books, music, DVD and games, all offering great deals, reviews and special features. The books site is unbeatable on price for titles published in the last 18 months. And if you're feeling bored, give the Incredible Randomiser a spin. It brings up a random selection of goods from the four sites at bargain prices, but within seconds the prices start to climb rapidly, so you need your wits about you, and fast reactions.

■ ***www.infront.co.uk***

For cool new threads try...

THE CLOTHES STORE

If you loathe wearing out shoe leather looking for new clothes but have a taste for the latest fashions, this site was made for you. Easy to use and pleasing to the eye, you'll find a great selection of men's and women's clothes. Click on the icons to get to the right clothes rack and pick out that new look from the likes of Ben Sherman and Chilli Pepper.

■ ***www.theclothesstore.com***

To check you're buying the best try...

WHICH?

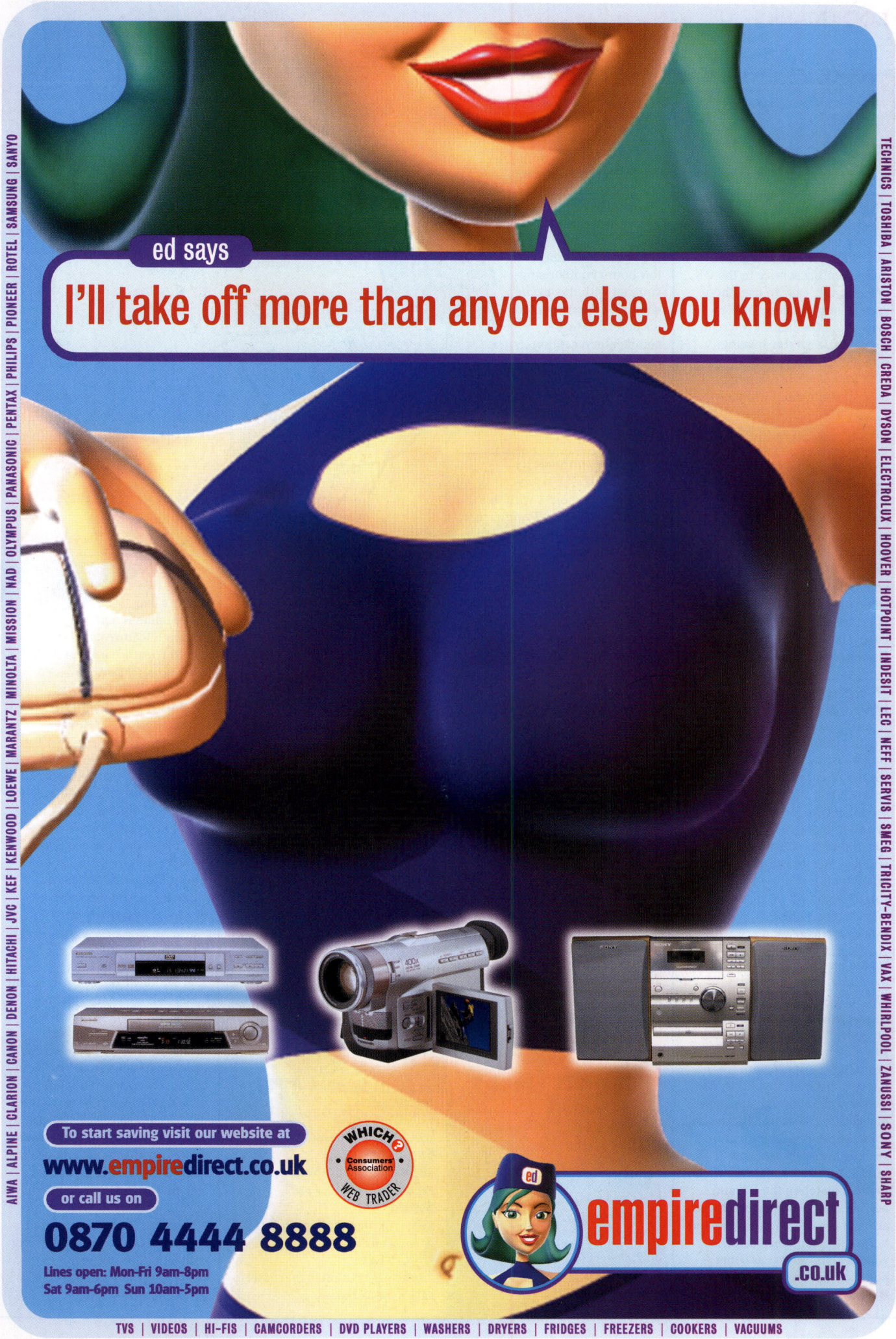
These days, when every toaster or kettle is an expression of your personality, it's easy to let style take precedence over function. Make sure that funky-looking breadmaker is actually the best available by dropping by Which?, the Consumer Association's website. You'll need to take out a subscription to access all the product reports, but it's worth every penny.

■ ***www.which.net***

WHERE NEXT?

The retail side of the Web has yet to find a business model that will work. Even Amazon, the online retailer everyone wants to be like, is still losing money hand over fist. They hope to build up a large enough market share so that when everyone buys everything online and all the shopping malls close down, they can hike up their prices and grow fat. It's hard to see it working out like that. Companies with bricks and mortar behind them, especially specialists, can probably trade profitably on the Internet by offering an online catalogue as a convenient extra for regular customers, but expect to see more of the high profile ventures continue to crash and burn.

Firebox: lots of cool toys for big grown-up boys


ed says
I'll take off more than anyone else you know!
To start saving visit our website at
www.empiredirect.co.uk
or call us on
0870 4444 8888
Lines open: Mon-Fri 9am-8pm
Sat 9am-6pm Sun 10am-5pm
WHICH? Consumers' Association WEB TRADER
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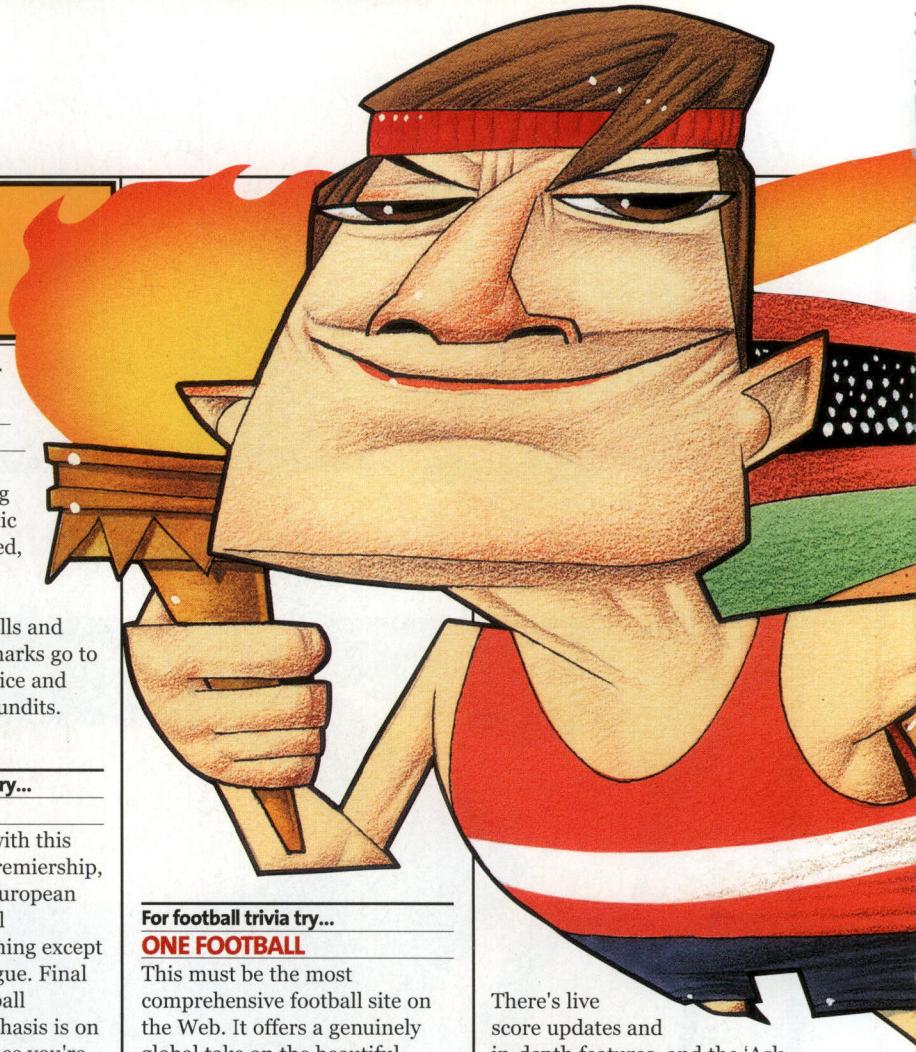
empiredirect .co.uk
AIWA | ALPINE | CLARION | CANON | DENON | HITACHI | JVC | KEF | KENWOOD | LOEWE | MARANTZ | MINOLTA | MISSION | NAD | OLYMPUS | PANASONIC | PENTAX | PHILIPS | PIONEER | ROTEL | SAMSUNG | SANYO
TECHNICS | TOSHIBA | ARISTON | BOSCH | CREDA | DYSON | ELECTROLUX | HOOVER | HOTPOINT | INDESIT | LEC | NEFF | SERVIS | SMEG | TRICITY-BENDIX | VAX | WHIRLPOOL | ZANUSSI | SONY | SHARP
TVS | VIDEOS | HI-FIS | CAMCORDERS | DVD PLAYERS | WASHERS | DRYERS | FRIDGES | FREEZERS | COOKERS | VACUUMS

SPORT



For an old-fashioned flutter try...

BLUE SQUARE

Blue Square is based in London and claims to be the largest online betting service in the UK. It's certainly easy to use: there's a great step-by-step guide to getting started, and if you're new to betting, a jargon-busting directory. Once you're happy with how it works, sign up, deposit some money in your

account and try your luck. If you're not too hot on sport, you could always bet on which of the Slater sisters will be the first to have a baby on *Eastenders*.

■ ***www.bluesq.com***

For sports news try...

SPORTAL

If you're passionate about sport, you'll love this well-thought-out site, boasting some of the most respected commentators in sport. It has a busy layout, but then it covers the whole gamut of sweat, blood and tears and on top of news, features, interviews and live update windows, it offers plenty of opportunities for you to sound off in the forums and opinion polls.

■ ***www.sportal.co.uk***

For the latest from the horse's mouth try...

SPORTING LIFE

As you might expect from such an enduring brand name, this site matches the authority of 150 years of experience with the latest Internet innovations. As well as a clean design and easy navigation, Sporting Life lays on some impressive extra features such as live Webcasts and instant updates from every major football match in the UK and beyond. If you want them, there are scoreboards, vidiprinters and tickers, bringing the scores to your desktop as fast as some poor sod can type them in.

■ ***www.sporting-life.com***

For live action from around the world try...

LIVESPORT365

It's worth spending a few hours familiarising yourself with this hectic site. If it's sports related, it's here: live text commentary, caption competitions, snap polls and the latest news. Top marks go to the football radio service and audio clips from the pundits.

■ ***www.sport365.com***

For the latest on footie try...

FINAL WHISTLE

You get four choices with this site: the FA Carling Premiership, Champions League, European Leagues, International Competitions...everything except your local Sunday league. Final Whistle takes its football seriously and the emphasis is on news and analysis. Once you're briefed, drop by the forums for a rant.

■ ***www.finalwhistle.com***

For football trivia try...

ONE FOOTBALL

This must be the most comprehensive football site on the Web. It offers a genuinely global take on the beautiful game and balances all the football trivia you'll ever need with some serious football talk. There's live score updates and in-depth features, and the 'Ask the Ref' feature is irresistible.

■ ***www.onefootball.com***

Sportal: in-depth coverage of nine different sports, with expert commentators

For a sense of fair play try...

THE ENGLISH CRICKET BOARD

Here's an under-publicised gem, and much needed following the recent demise of The Guardian's Cricket Unlimited. News headlines, stats, live coverage and player profiles are topped off with the site's biggest pull: online video diaries from England players on tour.

■ ***www.ecb.co.uk/redirect***

To break a sweat try...

SPORT GATEWAY

A great idea from Sport England (the flash new name for the Sports Council); those of you who spend too much time lounging in front of the screen checking the latest scores should check it out asap. The Gateway provides access to a searchable database of sporting contacts. It puts you in touch with leading sports organisations and people in your area to contact about learning, improving and taking part in sport. Choose from an A-Z listing of sports or search for sports facilities and sporting contacts in your region.

■ ***www.english.sports.gov.uk/gateway/gateway_1.htm***

HOT SHOTS

William Hill
Great betting site for beginners ***www.willhill.com*** -

International Amateur Athletic Federation
Excellent coverage of athletics around the world
ww.iaaf.org

Sporting Bet
Bet on sports action around the world
www.sportingbet.co.uk

OLD FAVOURITES

Soccernet
Extensive football coverage ***www.soccernet.com***

Sport Live
Impressive coverage from *The Express* ***www.sportlive.net***

Scrum
Where the rugby fans hang out
www.scrum.com

UK Cricket
Probably the busiest of the cricket sites ***www-uk.cricket.org***

To place a more sophisticated bet try...

SPORTING INDEX

If you're new to spread betting, this site will to be a little confusing at first, but don't be put off. You'll need to spend some time reading the introduction, but once you've got the hang of it (and if you've got the readies to risk) there'll be no stopping you. The variety of bets is almost unlimited. For example, you can wager on how many yards Lawrence Dallaglio will carry the ball and change your bet during the game, although you will have to download an application form and prove you have the money to cover your potential losses. Serious gambling, serious fun.

■ ***www.sportingindex.com***

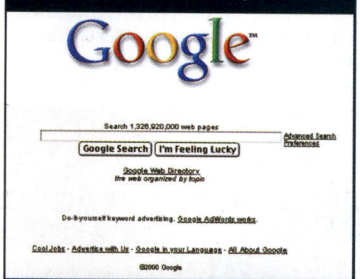
WHERE NEXT?

Sport's one area of the Internet where WAP and other media convergence is already coming into its own. Sport fans are like stockbrokers: they demand real time data, and up-to-the minute details of their team's changing fortunes. All the major sport sites obviously realise this, placing great emphasis on providing breaking news and scores as they come in. Those who can provide a customised update of accurate results in the fastest time will come out on top.

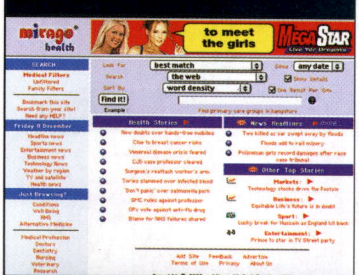
Search engine know-how

Search engines are still the life and soul of the Internet party and probably always will be. You can have the largest collection of bookmarks in the world, but if you don't know how to search effectively, you will never make the most of the Web. The trick is to use a selection of the best general and specialist engines, learn them inside out, and stick with them...until something better comes along, that is.

Altavista (***www.altavista.co.uk***) has always been the expert's general search engine of choice, but in the last 18 months Google's (***www.google.com***) impressive performance has definitely earned it a place at the top of the pile. Altavista still indexes more of the Web and comes out on top for more obscure searches, but Google is fast and easier to use. Among the specialist search engines, BUBL (***bubl.ac.uk/link***) is an excellent directory of sites compiled by librarians – who tend to know a thing or two about managing information. For coughs and sneezes Medisearch (***www.medisearch.co.uk***) is the best free UK medical search engine. And finally, Lycos' Database Search (***dir.lycos.com/Reference/Searchable_Databases***) has the best of the invisible Web, millions of pages of information hidden in databases that other search engines can't find.

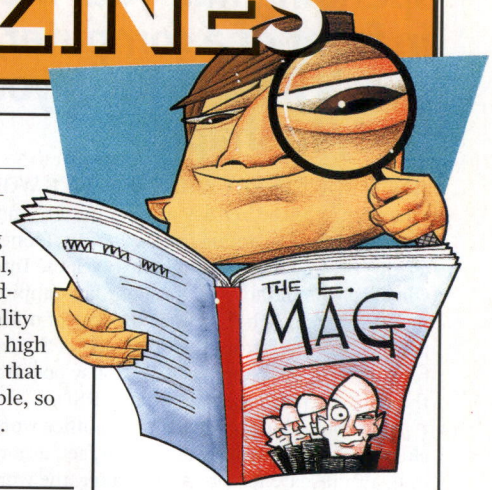


Google: rivalling AltaVista



Medisearch: free medical search engine

E-ZINES



For an established anti-establishment read try...

SALON

Salon remains the e-zine of choice for the thinking surfer: sleek, professional, high quality, yet still hard-hitting. Although the quality of the writing remains as high as ever, rumours abound that Salon is in financial trouble, so read it while you still can.

■ ***www.salon.com***

For wit and sheer creative energy try...

MCSWEENEY'S

Few other e-zines have attracted the kudos of McSweeney's: load up the simple text-based site and you'll soon see that the plaudits are well-deserved. The writing is original and inventive without being inaccessible or self-referential, erudite without being boring. A witty, engaging and highly enjoyable read.

■ ***www.mcsweeneys.net***

For a bit of the other try...

NERVE

Nerve is the Erotic Review for the younger set; it exists because 'sex is beautiful and obscure...in short, it is a subject in need of a fearless, intelligent forum for both genders.' The Nerve claims to be that forum and gives it a good shot, through fiction, essays, book and film reviews, poetry, reportage and photography.

■ ***www.nerve.com***

For some UK-based culture try...

SPIKE

Less arty than other e-zines in the same class, Spike's minimalist approach signals its preoccupation with the written word. It's mission: 'Picking the brains of popular culture'. Refreshingly UK-based, Spike was launched by Chris Mitchell three years ago. The writing is polished; not surprisingly since Mitchell writes professionally for *The Daily Telegraph*, among others. Drop by and you'll find book reviews, interviews with the likes of Will Self, films, literature and a daily Weblog of noteworthy links.

■ ***www.spikemagazine.com***

For the freshest poetry and fiction try...

THE EXQUISITE CORPSE

Described as a 'Journal of Letters and Life', this site could so easily descend into existential angst. Instead it's a showcase for an extremely high quality collection of poems, reviews, essays and just about anything else you can do with words. So much self-published material is flow of consciousness drivel or tired, infantile attempts to shock. Not here. Drop by and you can't fail to admire the fun-loving, engaging, earnest yet playful tone of the Corpse.

■ ***www.corpse.org***

For a global take try...

BLUE EAR

Blue Ear is a vehicle for writing from all over the world. These dispatches take the form of reportage, essays or discussions, and come from a fascinating variety of geographical and cultural perspectives. They are sharp, thoughtful and always enlightening.

■ ***www.blueear.com***

For spoof news try...

UNTITLED DOCUMENT

This new contender for online spoof newspaper of choice is squaring up to its older and more established rival, The Onion, and vying for supremacy. What's more, it's British. It still has some way to go before it takes the top spot, but it's trying hard, and deserves a few minutes of your day. You'll find stories just as true as in your daily paper...just true in a different way.

■ ***www.untitleddocument.co.uk***

THE SURFER'S GUIDE TO FITNESS

If you feel you're spending half your life in front of a computer, here's how to keep your body in shape

JUST ABOUT EVERY BRITISH OFFICE WORKER now spends his or her day at a computer. And with 10 million homes online in this country alone our leisure time also increasingly involves the Internet, which results in more hours spent key-tapping and mouse-pushing. That means that tens of millions of people are at risk from the downside of the computer revolution: back-pain caused by lousy posture, plus the risk of repetitive strain injury (RSI).

The problems don't just concern office workers; children are particularly at risk. In fact, according to health researcher Dr Leon Straker, the world is on the threshold of disaster: 'This is the first generation of children who have used computers from an early age, while their muscles and bones are still developing. If we don't get knowledge quickly about how to use these machines safely, then I think we'll see a lot of children disabled.'

But it's not all doom and gloom. Just a few minutes' exercise a day, backed up by some sensible furniture decisions, could drastically reduce the risk of computer-induced illness. So we asked Harley Street chiropractor Dr Antoni Jakubowski to show us where we're going wrong, and what we can do about it...

The computer

Whether you're driving a Pentium IV or a Vic 20, the important thing is to have set up your monitor dead ahead, with the top of the screen at eye level when seated upright. The arrangement seen here – too low on the desk and off to the side – is as good as booking a ticket to Stoke Mandeville.

The desk

It's only a piece of bloody furniture, so don't try living off the thing. Take your lunch outside, read the papers on the sofa, take a rest every 40 minutes at least, offer to get the coffee in – even the smallest amounts of exercise or breaks in your routine will give your long-suffering spine a rest.

WORDS: MATTHEW BINGHAM; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

Eyes

There's no easy solution here. So make sure you go for regular check-ups, and get down to the opticians straight away if you start suffering from persistent headaches. As for light levels, if you can't see shadows then it's too dark. Buy a lamp.

The phone

Pain is the body's way of telling you to change your ways, which is why a couple of minutes spent cradling the phone between your head and shoulder can hurt like billy-o. So if you must type as you talk, buy a hands-free headset. It could be the best investment you ever make.

Wrists

Resting your wrists on the desk is simply asking for trouble, as the stress of them rubbing against a hard surface can result in inflammation and long-term damage. If you find yourself doing it, get a wrist-rest.

Back

'Sit back straight, boy!' your teachers would scream. And the old buggers were right. Base of the spine against the back of the chair, neck straight, chin jutting out... ie, not like this at all.

Knees

A correct chair and desk arrangement should see your knees bent at 90°, with your soles resting flat on the floor. Dangling your feet from a chair that's too high, or bending them back under the seat, could mean the premature curtailment of your footballing days.

The chair

Even if you're only sitting for an hour a day at your computer, don't spend it perched on some antique you paid £2 for down the market. Soft cushions or quality leatherwork are irrelevant; height controls, a tall, adjustable back and armrests are the things that count.

WHAT IS RSI?

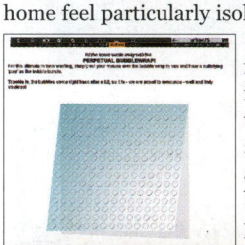
'The result of repeated stress is to weaken the muscles and tendons of the hands, arms and neck,' explains Dr Jakubowski. 'This stress then produces swelling of the involved joint, which in turn produces pain. Computer users ignore at their peril hand, wrist or forearm pain, numbness (during the day or, more commonly, while sleeping), and burning or tingling sensations which can start in the hands and work their way to the neck and shoulders.

'Any of these symptoms could mean trouble, and I'd advise anyone who suffers more than two days of pain to seek the attention of a chiropractor or a doctor who specialises in RSI. My practice, where we use the Gonstead method, has a 90 percent success rate in diagnosing and treating RSI. But, more importantly, prevention is the key.'

Back, arm and eye strain aren't the only problems facing anyone who spends the best part of the day staring at a computer screen. There's also the risk of 'Web rage', the frustration caused by slow-loading pages, dropped connections and all-round computer glitches. In fact, a recent survey for ICL found that computers were among the biggest causes of discontent in the office: one in eight workers believed their computers caused them more stress than being left by their partner.

But help is at hand for the frustrated computer user and, appropriately enough, it's to be found on the Net. Channel 4 has constructed a site to help anyone feeling under pressure at ***stress.channel4.com***, which includes a browsable archive of 400 questions asked by stressed-out surfers and answered by a panel of experts.

'Computers can be addictive, making it hard to spend time away from them,' explains the site's stress expert, Wendy Moore. 'Emails and the sheer pace of life in the modern workplace can also cause stress, while people who work a lot at home feel particularly isolated.'



Pop those bubbles boy-o

Wendy's solution is simple: 'The important thing is to walk away every 20 minutes or so, and take longer breaks whenever possible, including getting some exercise. Home users should pace their days out.'

In addition to checking out the information on the Channel 4 site, surfers can find other help online. 'Make friends with people in a similar situation to you and form an email support group,' suggests Wendy. 'Don't forget that the Web or email can help relieve stress. And use Web sites to calm yourself down. For example, when I'm stressed I go and burst virtual bubblewrap!' (***www.urban75.com/Mag/bubble.html***).

CHANNEL 4'S STRESSBUSTERS

1. Stop beating yourself up You don't need to be perfect.
2. Stop saying 'yes' Don't take on more than you can handle.
3. Stop and think Take a few minutes to weigh up your workload.
4. Stop and talk Communication is a great way to beat stress.
5. Stop rushing
6. Stop for lunch
7. Stop and take a walk
8. Stop and breathe
9. Stop working late
10. Stop taking work home

Doing it right!

'This chair is more suitable,' says Dr Jakubowski. 'Its height is adjustable, which means our computer user's legs are now bent at 90°, and it's got a high back for the support of the spine. I'd recommend the use of armrests, which help take the weight of your wrists, as well as a lumbar cushion for the base of the spine. See the resulting change in posture? We've also bumped up the height of the monitor to bring it to eye level – there's no need for expensive desk furniture, as a couple of old phone books will do.'

Contact Dr Jakubowski at the Gonstead Clinic, 22 Harley St, London W1N 1AP. Tel: 020 7637 2920.

THE WEB USERS' WARM-UP

Dr Jakubowski's simple exercises only take a few minutes a day, but could keep you out of Casualty

THE PRIEST

Bring the hands together with the base of the palms pressed against each other, as if in prayer. With elbows pointing out, move your hands down until you can 'feel the stretch' on your wrists. Hold for five seconds. Alternate with the 'Reverse Mantis' two or three goes at a time, twice a day.

THE REVERSE MANTIS

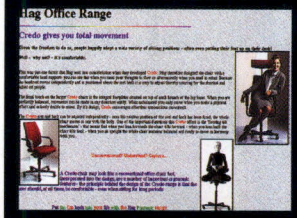
Hold the back of your hands together with elbows pointing outwards. Bring them down until you feel the burn in your wrists. Hold for five seconds. As with all these exercises, if you experience pain upon completion, apply an ice-pack for 15 minutes. If symptoms persist, go see the quack.

THE SQUEEZE

Keep a 'stress ball', sponge or any malleable object on your desk. Squeeze and release vigorously to exercise the finger and wrist muscles, and improve circulation. 'You can do this thousands of times a day,' says Dr J. 'I recommend you use a squash ball.' If you need an incentive, wait until the boss comes on the phone.

SIX SITES FOR SORE BUTTS

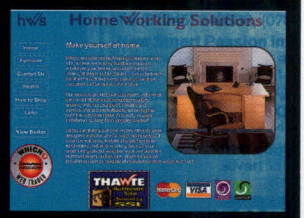
Ergonomic furniture and RSI advice online



POSTURE POINT

www.posture.co.uk

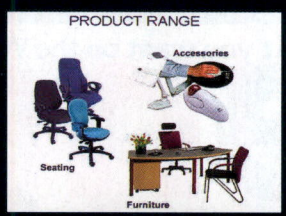
Specialist chair retailer, with prices ranging from £49 all the way up to £1,000-plus for some space-age Swedish designs. There's some good general information available on seating and posture, too.



HOME WORKING SOLUTIONS

www.homeworkingsolutions.co.uk

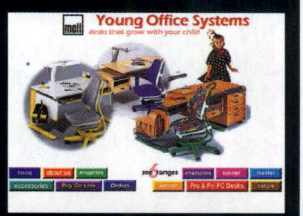
If your living room is also your office, or you simply spend every evening at your PC, invest in some decent furniture and give your back a break. It's all for sale here.



ERGONOMICS.CO.UK

www.ergonomics.co.uk

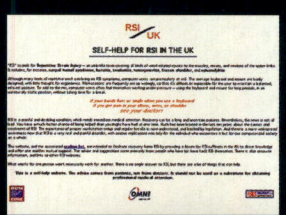
A little like peering in through a sweetshop window: a massive range of ergonomic furniture, supports and accessories – but no way to buy them online! Although they will send you a CD-ROM, if you ask nicely...



HOME STUDIES

www.homestudies.co.uk

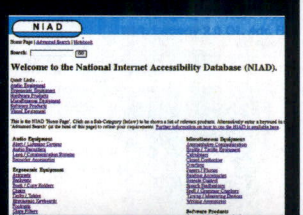
If that warning about children and computer use struck a chord, consider investing in this range of pint-sized furniture. Now your kids can doze at their desks, just like daddy.



RSI-UK

www.rsi-uk.org.uk

Something of a one-stop shop for information on any of the finger, wrist, arm, shoulder and back pain associated with RSI. Just bear in mind that it's no substitute for seeing a doctor.



NATIONAL INTERNET DISABILITY DATABASE

niad.disinhe.ac.uk

There's a great section here on ergonomic equipment, from armrests to copy-holders, with an impressive selection of links to boot.

THE SHOW-OFF

If you're surfing in the comfort of your own home, or can bear to hear the titters of your co-workers, then a couple of minutes spent stretching and bending before, during and after a prolonged session at your desk will do wonders for your back, neck and circulation.

THE RUBBER-NECKER

Slowly point your chin towards one shoulder, then swivel your head and do the same at the other shoulder. Alternate between the two for three to five seconds at a time, five for each side, two or three times a day. Your neck will thank you for your efforts.

THE TOWEL

At the end the day, roll a towel, tuck it under the base of your neck and lie flat for 10 minutes. 'One problem facing computer users is that your neck tends to spend the day bent forward,' says Dr J. 'This simple exercise helps prevent strain by bringing the angle of your neck back to 'neutral'.'

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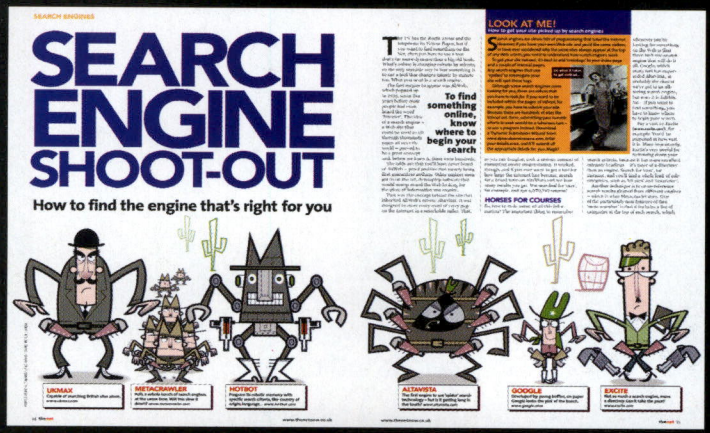

■ What Website

Our time-saving guide to great sites

■ Great features

Every month, we put the Net's big claims to the test – and reveal the sites that deliver

■ Bright Sparks

Everyday people making great sites

■ Web Icons

The personalities and sites standing God-like astride the Net

■ Step-by-step Net advice

Your guarantee that you'll be using the Net faster and cheaper

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Flat-panel monitors, gaming gear, MP3 players, modems, keyboards...

■ What ISP

Got the right connection? Our experts test the UK's biggest ISPs every month

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the net

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ADDRESS .....

.....

POSTCODE.....TELEPHONE.....

E-MAIL.....

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ADDRESS .....

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POSTCODE.....TELEPHONE.....

E-MAIL.....

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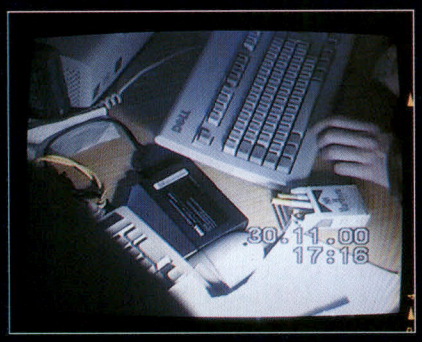
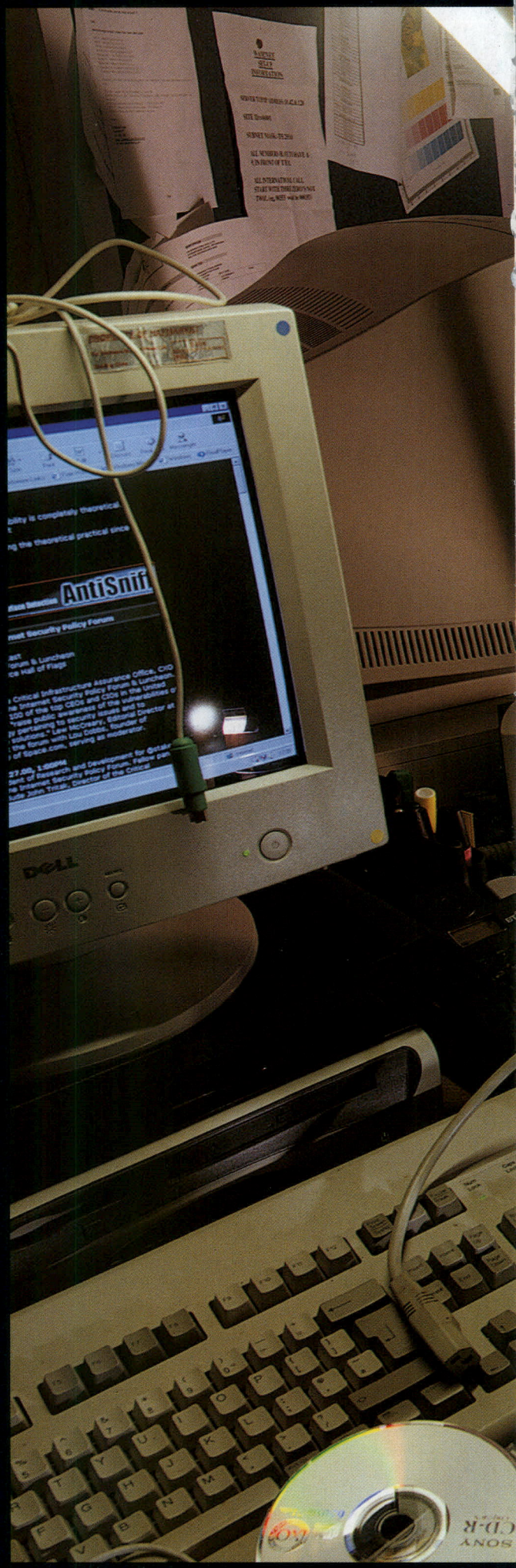


Enter the world of the hacker

Meet the man who wants to take over your machine...

ONCE UPON A TIME, WE SIMPLY HAD hackers, spotty teenagers with as many chips on their shoulders as were in their computers. Or, inexplicably, they were Robert Redford. But as the Web grew in size, new terms started to emerge from the subculture: 'crackers', 'script-kiddies', 'hacktivists'... So what has happened to the hacker in the age of the Internet?

Dr-K, founder of the *P/H-UK* hackers' e-zine, author of *A Complete Hacker's Handbook* and now a computer security consultant, takes up the story. 'What we have to remember is that the widespread use of the word "hacker" to mean "someone who breaks into computer systems" is a media invention. Originally a hacker was an enthusiast respected for his or her skill and knowledge about computer systems. Over time this has been applied by the media to what is in reality a disparate group of crackers, cybercriminals, cyberterrorists, cybergraffiti artists, cybervandals, hacktivists and, of course, "old school" hackers.



Coca-Cola
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'As the Internet grows in popularity and seeps into public consciousness, that old media boogie-man term, the "hacker", is slowly being replaced by a whole slew of terms which describe the attitude and actions of the widely disparate community that makes up the computer undergound. I think this is good, because the real hackers, the computer enthusiasts who love computers, can now reclaim the term. We can call ourselves hackers with pride.'

But those real hackers have changed, too: not least because hacking was previously a means of exploring industrial-strength computer systems individuals couldn't normally access. That meant learning the intricacies of UNIX – the heavyweight operating system once the sole preserve of academia, industry and the military.

Now, however, as Dr-K points out, 'anyone can get LINUX [the open-source version of UNIX] from a cover CD and run it on an old x86 box. You can have your own UNIX to play with, so this motivation has died down.'

What do 'real' hackers play with now? 'With the advent of the Internet, a lot less emphasis is placed on traditional security, so the focus has shifted to TCP/IP [the protocols by which information is transferred over the Net]. I see a lot of things done with TCP/IP

Last year's Love Bug virus cost businesses an estimated £5.4bn

nowadays that would have been unthinkable ten years ago, when it wasn't so well understood by hackers.'

THE VIRAL MENACE

Some of those things, of course, are still considered pretty unthinkable by the rest of us. Take the writing and distribution of viruses designed to roam the Web. Last year's Love Bug virus cost businesses an estimated £5.4bn. What, exactly, is the 'pride' to be had from an activity that can bring misery to thousands of computer users? 'There are real technical challenges in writing a virus or a worm [a program that migrates from one machine to another], and I can understand why people are fascinated by that. And virus-writing is interesting because of the almost lifelike self-replication of the code.

'There are loads of people writing viruses which never get seen "in the wild" because they are responsible researchers experimenting with this cutting-edge technology. Worms also present very interesting technical challenges, because the aim is to build a program which seeks out information or accumulates data. Again, this is cutting-edge stuff, related to "agent" technology and artificial intelligence – the very future of the Web. So writing a worm is not a bad thing, if it's controlled.'

That's a big 'if' of course, and daily experience shows that there are plenty of less responsible researchers. Those that consider themselves to be

DR-K'S GLOSSARY

CRACKER
Generic term for anyone who breaks system security.

CYBER-VANDALS
Crackers who want to damage data or Web sites.

CYBERCRIMINALS
Crackers who want to commit fraud or computer-based crime.

CYBERGRAFFITI
The defacement of Web sites by crackers for reasons of ego. The equivalent of 'tagging' trains and buses.

HACKTIVISTS
Crackers who aim to take down sites to which they have political or moral objections.

PHREAK
To crack a phone network.

SCRIPT KIDDIES
People who know very little about hacking but download programs from the Net designed to crack system security.

MEET THE HACKERS

Four infamous information highwaymen

CAP'N CRUNCH

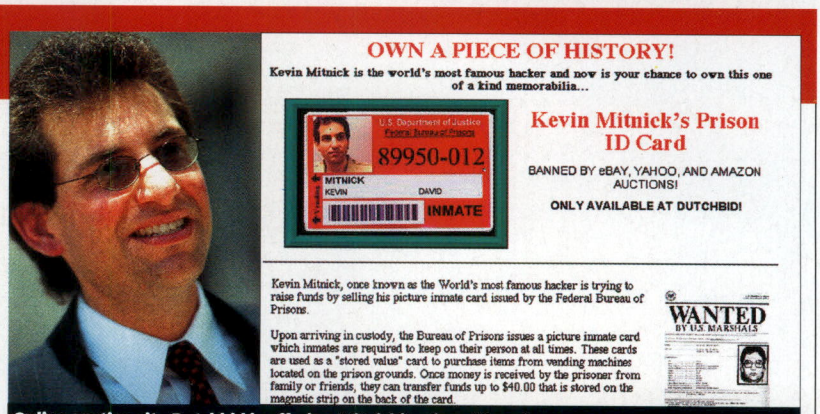
Born John Draper, this infamous 70s 'phreaker' discovered that the note produced by the free plastic whistler in packets of Cap'n Crunch cereal could fool US telephone switchboards into giving him a free call. The Cap'n went on to incorporate the whistle into a device which he passed on to other early hackers (including Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak)... until the law caught up with him.

PHIBER OPTIK

Another notorious phone phreaker, Phiber Optik (aka Mark Abene), learned to use computers by playing with the machines on sale at the A&S department store in New York. As a teenager he hacked into the phone system so often that his receiver had to be held together by tape to stop its innards spilling out. Eventually sentenced to a year in prison, upon release he was named one of *New York* magazine's '100 Smartest People'.

VLADIMIR LEVIN

This Russian mathematician was arrested by Interpol in 1995 after using his office computer in St Petersburg to hack into the Citibank mainframe in New York, moving $10m into false accounts. The cops eventually recovered most of the money and Levin got 36 months in jail, although $400,000 remains missing to this day.



Online auction site Dutchbid is offering Mitnick's prison ID card

KEVIN MITNICK

The first hacker ever to have his face on an FBI 'Most Wanted' poster, Mitnick learnt his trade by hanging out at the local Radio Shack. Nabbed in 1988 for breaking into hardware giant's DEC's network, Mitnick pleaded 'computer addiction' in front of a Californian court and managed to get off with a light sentence. Currently back in the Grey Bars Motel for handling stolen cellphone numbers.

WORDS: STEVE SHIPSIDE; PICTURES: STEVEORINO, CORBIS, NEWSMAKERS. PICTURES POSED BY MODEL

'real' hackers, Dr-K included, get seriously aggrieved by the virus writers, believing that many are out simply to make a name for themselves. 'The charges against the guy who wrote the Love Bug were dropped, so we have no way of knowing why he did it. And the Melissa author denies doing anything and has yet to come to trial, so we'll have to wait and see what his motivation was...'

THE GOOD GUYS?

Not all hackers are destructive. There are both 'white hat' and 'black hat' versions. Most white-hat hackers don't make it into the public eye because they are quiet researchers or security consultants, but some have taken up the sword of justice, Zorro-like, on the Web. The community points to the North American Man Boy Love (NAMBLA) hack. The content on the organisation's site was subtly changed to appear to be promoting paedophilia, which the hackers believed it really stood for in the first place. 'Taking down such sites is a very clear way of ethical hackers policing cyberspace,' Dr-K claims, adding that 'it's a way of saying "NO" before governments get together and apply that blunt instrument called the law, and kill a lot of free speech.'

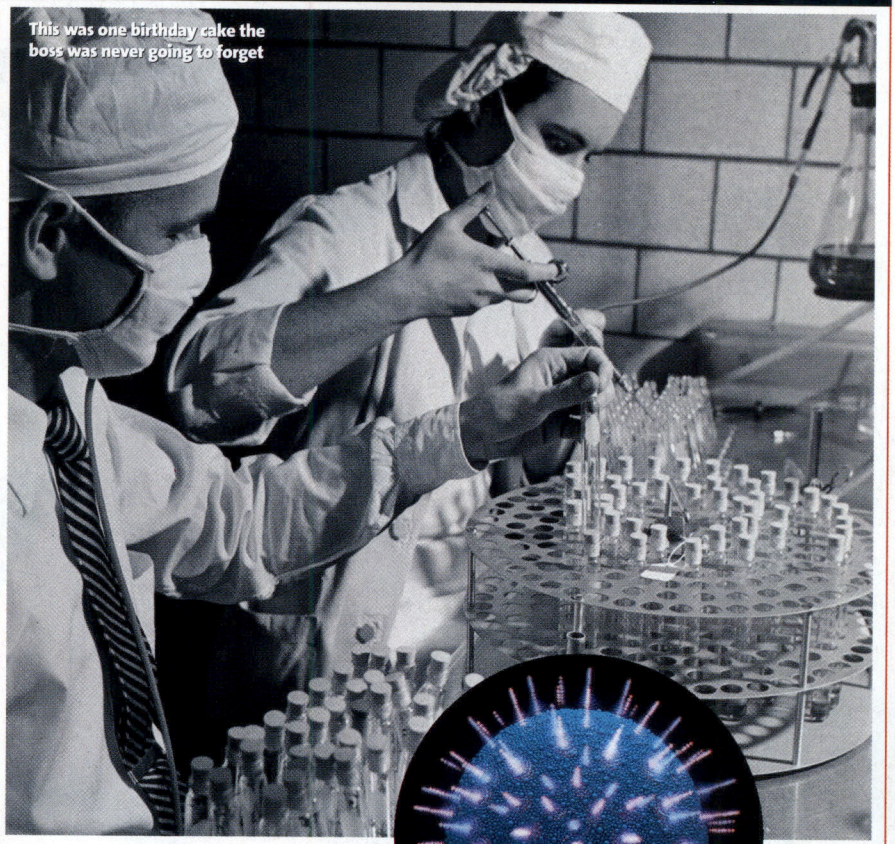
This raises the tricky issue of policing

being left to the police, since history holds plenty of lessons about the dangers of vigilantism. 'It's interesting that you talk about the police, as the people who hacked the NAMBLA site are the criminals because NAMBLA is protected by US laws on freedom of speech. Some hackers might argue that they are only exercising *their* freedom of speech by defacing the site.'

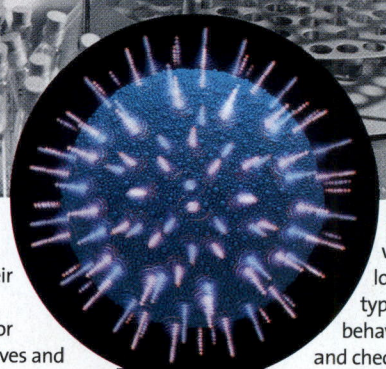
The ethics of e-avengers can be argued over until the cybercows come home, but for most users of the Net it's not morality that matters so much as money. As the Web becomes increasingly commerce-orientated, there is the ever-present fear of the hacker not as Zorro but as Dick Turpin. Are browser-based highwaymen poised to intercept e-commerce transactions?

Dr-K thinks the threat is overrated. 'I'm a firm believer that the majority of credit card fraud is non-Internet based. That you have more chance of having your card abused after paying for a takeaway than you do after shopping at, say, Amazon. I've never had any problems paying for anything on the Internet, but I *do* make sure I transmit over a secure link. I also only deal with reputable

What is a virus?



This was one birthday cake the boss was never going to forget



No wonder the Imac had been sneezing

Computer viruses, like people, are not created equal. Some are malicious, grudge-holding code vandals created to destroy data or damage systems. Others are just for 'fun', displaying daft messages or playing tunes.

Increasingly, the penetration of the Web into homes and businesses means the most effective viruses are those which spread rapidly, rather than aim to impact on any one type of machine. Take a virus like last year's Love Bug: it wrought chaos across the world by scanning Microsoft Outlook users' address books and sending itself on to the next 50 people it found.

Even those bogus 'virus warning' messages that clog up your email, usually backed up by dire proclamations from the likes of IBM/AOL/Microsoft, are a form of virus. Gullible email users send the warning on to all their colleagues/friends, thereby duplicating and spreading the virus, which is the message itself.

A few years ago, all viruses were pure programming: self-replicating code intended to exploit the way a computer works. Once introduced to an operating system they caused mischief in three ways. 'Boot sector' viruses made their home on the hard or floppy drives and were loaded into memory on start-up, after which they could infect other floppies put into the machine. 'Executable load' viruses needed a program as a host and could run only when the program itself was running. 'Polymorphic' viruses could do either, with the twist that each time they duplicated themselves they introduced random copying errors, so that virus scanners had a hard time picking their code out.

Some were cooked up by malcontent programmers; others started life as experiments before 'escaping' into the wild. Almost all can be spotted by virus-scanning software, which both looks for typical virus behaviour and checks any programs it detects against known examples of viruses, which is why you should update your software regularly.

Use common sense: don't open any programs or files unless they've been scanned first

The recent wave of Web viruses, on the other hand, is a different matter. First, the tools required to create them are often much easier to master: the 'virus warning' virus only needs email software to thrive. More serious are 'macro' viruses like Melissa, where the rogue code comes as a macro – a bit of code found in legitimate software. As macros are common in programs like spreadsheets and even Word documents, it's hard to pick out good code from bad; and the tools needed to create them are provided by the program itself.

Virus scanners might now be aware of Melissa and the Love Bug, but new variations are still popping up. Your best protection is to use common sense: don't open attachments from unknown sources, and even if they've come from known sources, don't open any programs or files unless they've been scanned first.

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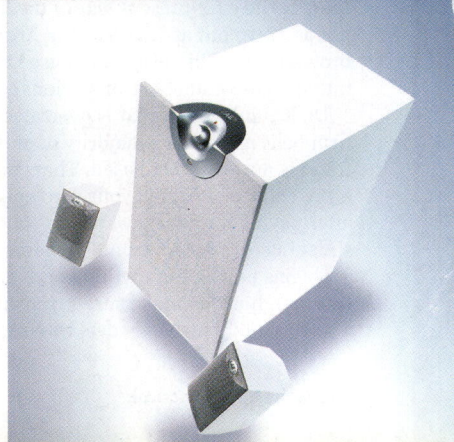

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ASK FOR A DEMONSTRATION AT LEADING HI-FI AND ELECTRICAL RETAILERS

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companies, just as I do with mail order, to reduce the chance of non-arrival of goods.' (For more advice on safe shopping, turn to page 68.)

This doesn't mean to say that e-commerce sites themselves aren't ripe targets for hackers, although the good Doctor feels strongly that most problems to date owe their failings to the site builders. 'The most common errors made in setting up e-commerce sites have nothing to do with SSL [Secure Socket Layer, the scrambling technique that protects 'secure session' information in transit] or other security methods. Invariably they involve poor password routines, bad programming and stupid things like "backdoor admin" passwords – access points in programs intended to allow maintenance and development.'

Inexperience and the pressure of time to market may well be the cause of this inherent insecurity. 'Most of the e-commerce sites that have had problems have rushed themselves to market and have managed to make very fundamental errors in design and programming. Then they won't admit it's their fault. Last year a guy found and duly reported a security hole in a banking site that let him see account details, credit-card numbers and passwords. This has happened to a number of online banks to date. But when he tried to report it, they gave him the brush-off and accused him of hacking! This does e-commerce no favours.'

It can even be argued, on a survival-of-the-fittest basis, that the presence of hackers is a positive force, culling weak and poorly conceived sites. 'Because of hackers, computer security is far, far better than it used to be. Companies are starting to realise that poor security cannot be fobbed off on their customers. They know that some smart hacker somewhere is going to figure it out and that their customers are going to take their business somewhere else, so they'd better do their homework and build security features into their software.'

CYBERTERRORISM

E-commerce isn't the only hacker battlefield. The outbreak of fighting in Palestine has highlighted the fact that cyberwar has come of age. Both Israeli and Palestinian Web sites have been brought down, leading to claims from *Jane's Defence Review* that the Israeli Defence Force has a dedicated e-war squad.

So if the next war is going to be electronic, does that mean the Web is populated with the cyberwarriors and terrorists of tomorrow? Dr-K entirely agrees that the

Protect yourself!

Most home users are unlikely to be troubled by any unwanted activity other than the occasional virus, for which the answer is to install a virus scanner.

Few companies are at serious risk either, but it's sensible to conduct a mini-audit on what would be at stake if you or your business were targeted. As well as the potential cost of losing data or days' worth of work, there's the potential damage to systems and relations that could result from passing viruses on to companies with which you are electronically linked.

Virus scanners, such as McAfee or Norton Anti Virus, will pick up most examples of rogue code, and there are shareware packages such as F-Prot from F-Secure). Good computing practice is just as important, so don't download pirate software, and scan any floppy disks or mail attachments before opening files. If you have several computers, think about establishing a 'quarantine' computer, disconnected from the rest of the network, on which to try out new software/CD-ROMs/floppies, etc.

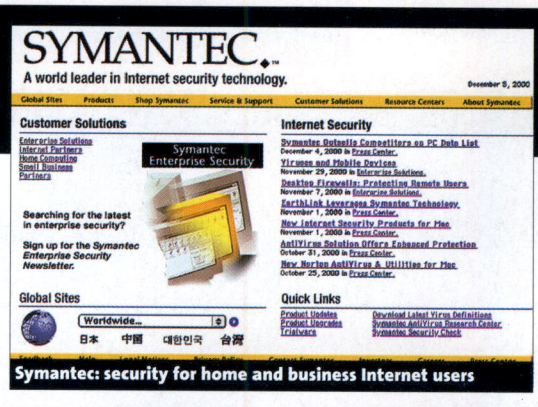
When surfing the Web, you're potentially vulnerable to 'probing'. It sounds ticklish and it is. ISPs, marketing companies and hackers all send information down your dial-up connection as a means of port scanning: gleaning the details of your machine. Seal up your ports with firewall software , such as the excellent Zone Alarm. If you have an always-on broadband connection, such as ADSL, bear in mind that you are constantly open to probing.

Start taking passwords seriously. Password-protect everything that can be and insist that colleagues do likewise. Lazy passwords are the hacker's delight, so avoid obvious terms like 'password', obscenities (surprisingly popular) or clever puns. They can be cracked in nanoseconds by a password scanner: a piece of software that runs likely password combinations until it cracks the code. Beware, also, of using personal information: your partner's name, your nickname or favourite football team are all too easily given away. Combinations of numbers and letters are far harder to crack; combinations written down because you forget them are no use at all.

Not all hacking is done remotely using computers. Favourite means of grabbing access codes include 'shoulder surfing' while the victim is working on their machine, rooting through wastebins for Post-It notes, and posing as an IT staffer.

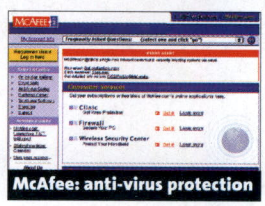
When online, if a program requires you to type in your password twice, even though you're sure you got it right first time, then have a word with the boys in IT.

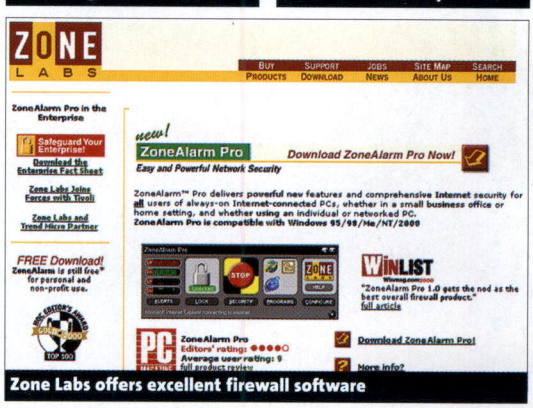
Finally, if you really believe you're at high risk of being hacked, then it's time to pay for an 'ethical hacker' consultancy to probe your system for weak spots. Whatever it costs, it's likely to be less expensive than having the unethical hackers get there first.



Symantec: security for home and business Internet users

F-Secure: great shareware


McAfee: anti-virus protection



Zone Labs offers excellent firewall software

www.mcafee.com
www.norton.com
www.datafellows.com
www.zonealarm.com

military have the hackers, the tools and the expertise, but finds it less than likely that the real professionals are to be found tooled up on the Web.

'What's the point of training your cyberwarriors on the Internet when they're going to leave their footprints all over intrusion detection systems? What gain is there if they break into an Internet machine using new, unknown techniques, only for the system administrator to work out how it was done and the information becoming public knowledge?

'The Internet is just not secret enough, and both the military and cyberterrorists need secrecy. But what I can imagine are training centres where operatives are schooled in penetration and intrusion detection. Where they can run endless training scenarios, so that thinking in TCP/IP becomes second nature to them. Then they can take the best of the trainees and use them as "tiger teams" to test internal security. These cyberwarriors will never appear on the Internet, never become known, but they are gaining skills that could be used in a very real assault on the information infrastructure of a country.'

Hacking – it's a man's life.

A Complete Hacker's Handbook is out now from Carlton Books, priced £6.99

THE GREATEST HACKS OF ALL TIME

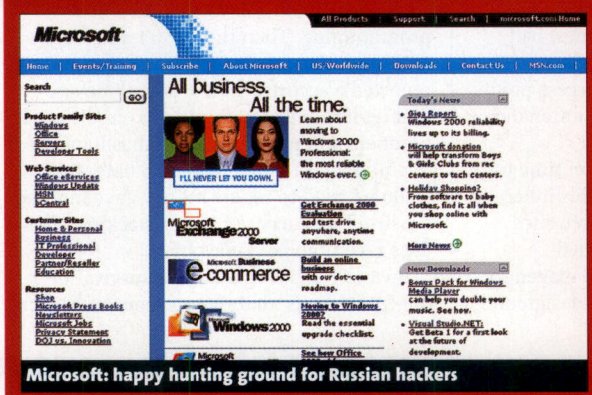
Kids, eh? What can you do with them?

1988

ROBERT TAPPAN MORRIS, 22, decides to identify every server on the very young Internet, so he writes some software designed to hop from machine to machine. Unfortunately, a misplaced decimal point means his program, the 'Worm', copies itself thousands of times on each server. More than 6,000 computers crash, one in every ten machines online at the time. Morris gets three years probation, 400 hours community service and a $10,000 fine.

1992

KEVIN POULSEN was at Sun Microsystems when he and some friends hacked into Bell Telephone's computers. As he'd been engaged in US government defence work, the charge against him was automatically bumped up to espionage. He went on the run for five years, using his skills to support himself by fiddling radio phone-in competitions, before being caught and sentenced to five years. Since his release, he lectures in Information Warfare.



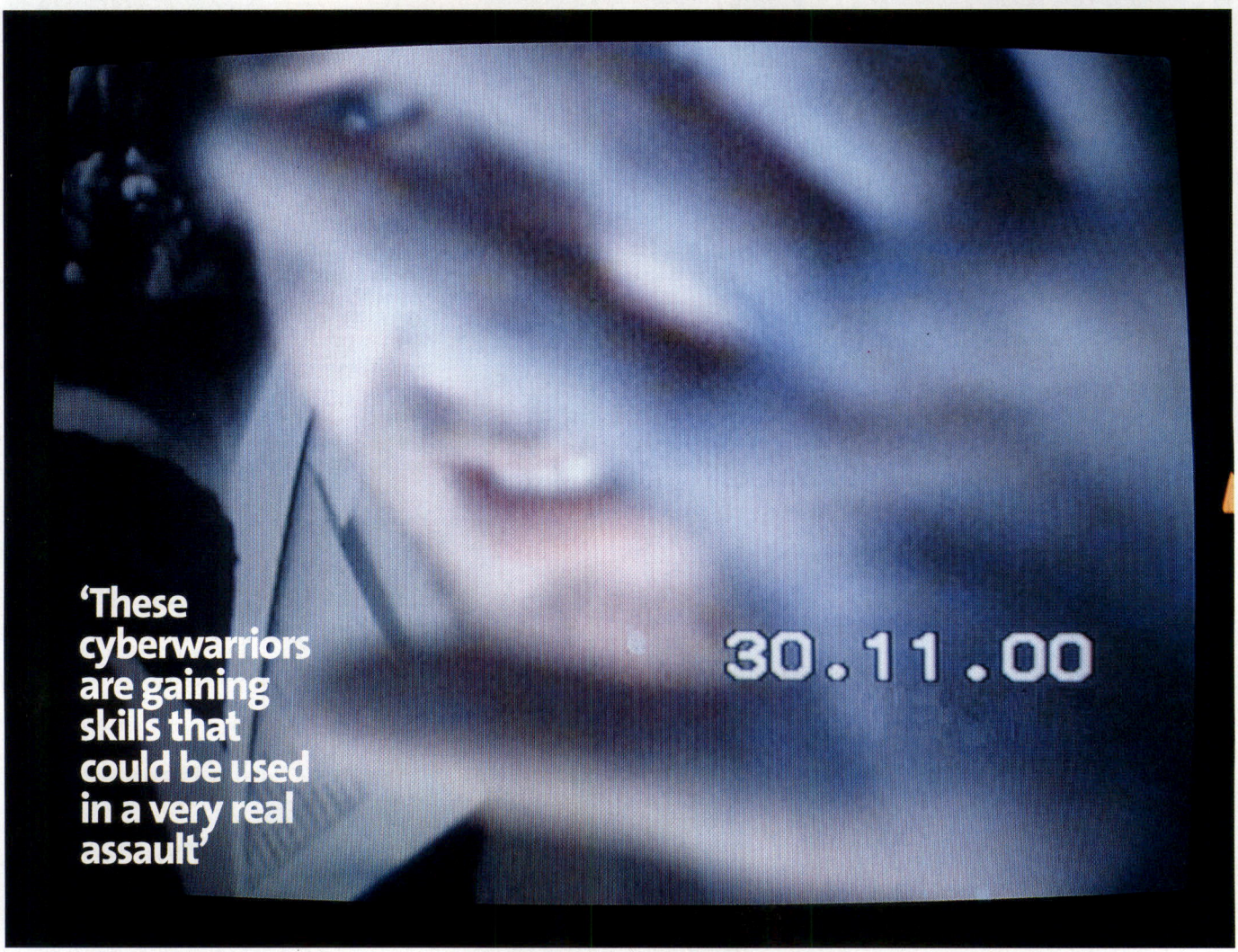
Microsoft: happy hunting ground for Russian hackers

1998

THE SMALL CALIFORNIA TOWN of Cloverdale is besieged by FBI agents after experts trace a series of attacks on Pentagon computers to a pair of local teenage hackers. The lads had been taking part in a unofficial student competition to see who could infiltrate furthest into government computers. Embarrassed officials are eventually forced to admit to a total of 11 major breaches of security, while Cloverdale High School cuts the 'kids' off from the Internet for a couple of months.

2000

MICROSOFT, the biggest software company in the world, is forced to admit that Russian hackers have been rampaging through its own computers for months. In the now familiar pattern of overkill, Bill Gates calls in the FBI while simultaneously claiming industrial espionage. The rest of the world laughs heartily.



...get grounded...

metal-is.com

THE NEW FAMILY BOARD GAME

INCARCERATION

www.incarceration.co.uk

RISK TAKERS
CREATIVITY UNLEASHED

DIGITAL DIVAS

Stand aside Ulrika, as the new breed of singing, dancing virtual presenters strut their cybernetic stuff

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY

TMMY

If you're rapidly tiring of plastic, manufactured teen idols, then why not try a manufactured virtual star instead? Tmmy, a 'sort of' sister to cyber newscaster Ananova (they were dreamed up in the same design studio), has the moves, the tunes and the style to give Britney *et al* a run for their money. Conceived as the world's first electronic pop sensation (just imagine – no hangovers, no boob jobs and not a whiff of a drug problem), the shapely 21-year-old from Strathclyde enjoys snowboarding and kickboxing, is fluent in several European languages and spends her spare time mixing with 'up-and-coming media and fashion people.' She's also 'modern, feisty and very distinctive,' it says here. Having made a cyber-debut presenting reviews at the Edinburgh Festival, the annoyingly-named e-chick (it's pronounced Timmy, in case you're wondering) has unveiled her musical talents to the world with new single *You Make My Day*, available via her Web site. Is the world ready for a pixellated Madonna? Watch this space.

www.tmmy.co.uk

ULALA

It's the 25th century and a breed of super-aliens have attacked the Earth, sending humans into trances with their dance-inflicting ray guns. Enter Ulala, a news reporter whose magical jiving powers can free the enslaved earthlings. A bit like Julie Andrews then, only better looking. As star of the Dreamcast game *Space Channel 5* Ulala has become quite a hit, both on- and offline, with personal appearances and a growing cyber fan club.

www.sega.com/sega/game/sc5_launch.jhtml

ANANOVA

The original (and many would say the best) cyberbabe out there, Ananova began life as a vehicle for the PA to deliver news updates to Web users tired of the old text-driven format. The press certainly fell for her hook, line and sinker, dedicating column inches galore to the virtual phenomenon. A seven-figure sale to mobile network Orange made the whole venture worthwhile. And the green-haired presenter certainly shows no signs of slowing down: 'My service is going completely mobile,' Ananova tells us. 'Soon you'll be able to hear me read personal news reports from any mobile phone. The future could be mobiles, interactive TV or whatever comes next.' And best of all, you'll be able to change that hair.

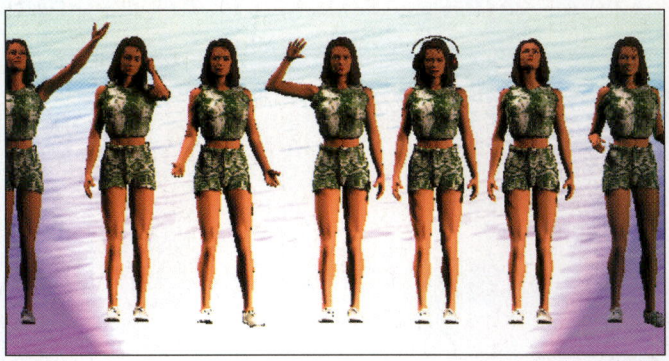
www.ananova.com

Ananova: wants to nestle in your pocket

CLICKA

You might not have heard of her yet, but Clicka, it seems, is quite a star in her native France. Mind you, so was Sacha Distel. As presenter and guide of pan-European Web TV portal Clicvision, she's become a cult figure across the Channel, and hits these shores in the new year as the company mounts a hi-tech British invasion. Fluent in five languages and 'sensual and feminine,' single cyber-fellas will be delighted to learn she's currently looking for a virtual partner with whom to spawn mini-Clickas. And no, we're not making this up. ***www.clicvision.com***

Clicka: yes, she does talk with a French accent



BABE

Stand by for the Web's first ever virtual catfight. In the blue corner, world-famous newscaster and cyber-icon Ananova. And in the red corner, meet... Babe, flagship presenter of News1st, a digitized four-piece news team created by entrepreneur John Bartram. The problem? Bartram claims his team were delivering the word to the Web a full two months before Ananova first graced our browsers, thus rubbishing her claims to be the original cyber-presenter. Put those nails away now, ladies... ***www.news1st.org.uk***

FLASH BOYFRIEND

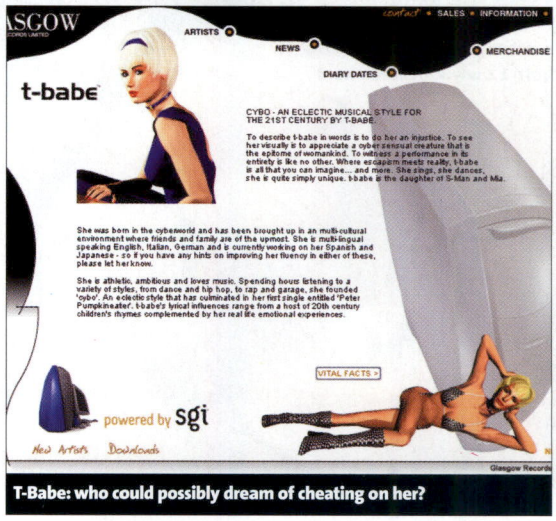
One for the ladies, this. Max, aka Flash Boyfriend, is 6ft 2in, blue-eyed, dark-haired and available for dates right across the Web. Click the right options and use the right lines and you too could be stepping out with the Net's most desirable bachelor. But be warned: his ex-girlfriend and best friend are both determined to stop you. It's all the brainchild of teenagers' cable channel Trouble, who have already sent Max on hundreds of virtual dates. Who says blondes have all the fun? ***www.trouble.co.uk/FlashBoyfriend***

Max: strangely devoid of bodyhair

T-BABE

Just as surely as an African nation will eventually win the World Cup, so it can only be a matter of time before we see a virtual chart-topper. And it could well be T-Babe, the first artist to roll off the production line of Scottish independent label Glasgow Records. The multilingual 18-year-old releases her debut single *Peter Pumpkineater* – dedicated to a cheating ex-boyfriend – later this month, and has already been voted 'most beautiful new pop star' by the Italian version of *Cosmopolitan*. 'My dream would be to do a single with Madonna and Robbie Williams,' says T-Babe. 'I've always wanted to be a singer. My dad used to say when I was growing up that if I knew my schoolwork as well as I knew song lyrics I would go far. I just hope Peter's watching me now – that'll teach him.'

www.glasgowrecords.com/tbabe.htm



T-Babe: who could possibly dream of cheating on her?

Mathmos 'Bubble' light £39.95

Squeezably soft (which is actually how you turn it on), this new light from lava lamp kings Mathmos is made from silicone and positively glows. No bulb here – just charge it up and it's ready for action. Visit ***www.mathmos.com*** for details.

Stonehenge candle $12.99

The lowering of the miniature Stonehenge in *Spinal Tap* is one of the funniest movie scenes of all time. Recreate the moment in your living room with this official Tap merchandise. Dancing dwarf not supplied. ***spinaltapdirect.com***

RETAIL THERAPY

If you haven't been tapped out by Christmas, e-commerce awaits, ready to serve your needs

Linen from £55

If you're looking to update your range of bed linen through either choice (floral is so *now*) or necessity (the moths had a lovely winter feast), log on to ***www.marksandspencer.co.uk***. Delivery times and prices vary.

Ring £59

Visit this extremely elegant site and treat yourself to a bit of art – to adorn either your walls or yourself. Delivery is within two weeks and costs from £2. ***www.artstream.com***

Die-cast cars £47.45

These magnificent 1/18 models of Colin McRae's Ford Focus and Richard Burns' Subaru Impreza are among the hundreds at ***racing-models.co.uk***. Delivery within 28 days; p&p from £3.25.

HeadBlade £9.95

Shaving your head can be a tricky pastime, so make life a whole lot easier for yourself with this very handy little gizmo. Especially contoured for the scalp, the razor will help cut time spent on your morning ablutions. Delivery is £1 and takes 24 hours. ***www.male-grooming.co.uk***

Wine £35.99

Chase away the January blues with the help of this rather nice case of fine wines. This selection of New World Classics is just one of many at ***www.chateauonline.co.uk***, where p&p is £5.99 and delivery takes 7 days.

GamePod from £395

If you're serious about driving games, you can't afford to be without the GamePod. Strap yourself into the unit's rally seat, fire up your PSX, PC or whatever, and off you go! All this for the price of a real car. ***www.ashdesign.com***

Memo chair £90

This amazing inflatable chair transforms itself from a soft beanbag to a hard seat in seconds. Wow – lounging around just gets better and better. Buy online from the very funky ***www.inflate.co.uk***

Caleche dishes £55

The very thing to have on show at an elegant little soiree, these pretty little dishes simply ooze sophistication. Delivery times vary, p&p is £7.95 from ***www.smallislandtrader.co.uk***

THE NET'S TOP TIPS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

Keep to our simple guidelines, and there's no reason why online shopping should end in a puddle of tears

■ **CHECK THE SITE IS SECURE** A small padlock will appear in the bottom left of your browser to show that you can safely send credit card details through the site. Your Web browser will also tell you whether a site is secure or not when you enter it.

■ **SHOP WITH BRAND-NAME COMPANIES** As with any shopping, you're better off with a company you've actually heard of.

■ **CHECK DELIVERY TIMES AND CHARGES** Companies should tell you the delivery charge if there is one on their site. If you live in the Highlands and Islands or Ireland, you may find that free delivery does not apply.

■ **NEVER SEND ANYTHING BY EMAIL** If a site asks for card details by email, don't oblige. It's far, far easier for emails to be intercepted.

■ **PRINT THE CONTRACT** This is the only permanent record of your purchase, so make sure you keep it, along with your order number and other details. Don't forget: if it's a UK site, you have the same consumer rights as you do in the High Street.

■ **IF IT GOES WRONG, DON'T WORRY** Contrary to scare stories, online shopping is safer and very often cheaper than traditional methods – and it's in the online store's interest to sort any problems out quickly.

PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK WRIGHT

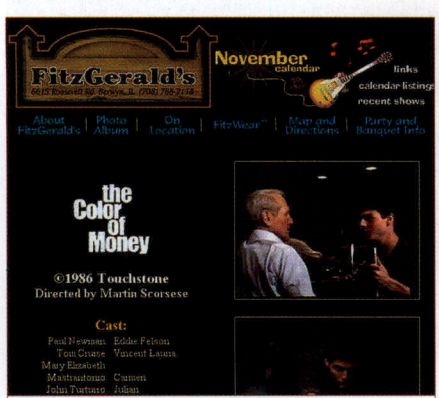
GRAPHICS
DVD
SOUND
SPEAKERS
CD-RW
Wouldn't it be cool to carry around your entire music collection?
Sorted.
Live the experience
DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER
DAP JUKEBOX
The Creative D.A.P Jukebox stores 4 days of hi-fi quality music using MP3 and other future formats. You can enjoy listening to 150 albums, that's 1500 tracks of EAX enhanced audio, wherever you go. Find out more about our latest Personal Digital Entertainment products at WWW.CREATIVEJUKEBOX.COM
CREATIVE
PERSONAL DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT
Starts Here.
All Your Music. Wherever You Go.

What Website?

THE BEST OF THE WEB REVIEWED EACH MONTH

THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

P96 **WEB CELEBS** They've become famous through the Net: Mahir, Margolis *et al* enjoy their 15 megabytes of cyber-fame



P76 **MOVIES** Hours of surfing fun for fans of films with a sporting theme, plus where to find the best movie sites

P97 **GAMES** Wizard news: pinball is alive and kicking! Not to mention flicking, dinging, flashing, tilting...

FEBRUARY 2001

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The hellraisers of rock

TELEVISION 74
All hail *The Simpsons!*

MOVIES 76
Films that pack a punch, pot the black and do other sporty stuff

SPORT AMERICAN FOOTBALL 79
Get the beers out, it's Super Bowl time

CELEBS 81
Reckon your face could bring you fame and fortune? We'll see about that...

MEDIA 82
Web-based comic strips to astound, amuse, confuse and beffudle

SPORT HEROES OF 2000 84
The glory boys and girls of the year

COMEDY 86
Here's a clue: 'This parrot is no more...'

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Stash the cash – try swapping instead

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New ways to blow up your kitchen

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How to find a wired lawyer

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Cut shifty salesmen out of the loop and save money, too

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New Year resolution: take a class!

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The stars of the InterWeb

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The original games machine is still going strong, if you know where to look

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The Web of the living dead

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Sharp sites on the cutting edge

HELLRAISERS

The bad boys of rock

As Marilyn Manson tours the UK and the *Daily Mail* gets in a froth, we salute rock's greatest hellraisers

The Best of Happy Mondays

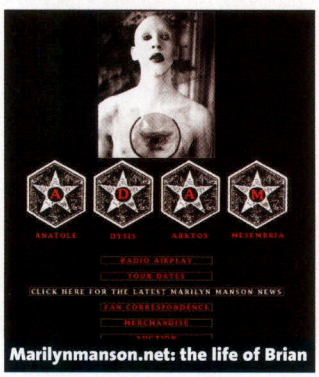
come.to/happymondays ★★★

Epitomising the dodgy Manc while Liam Gallagher was still bunking off school, Happy Mondays frontman Shaun Ryder is responsible for more tales than the Brothers Grimm. Among other things, his stolen car was used in an armed robbery on Salford's Harry Ramsden's, he edited *Penthouse* for a day and swore so much on *TFI Friday* that the show's been pre-recorded ever since.

Marilyn Manson

www.marilynmanson.net ★★★★★

The moral majority love to hate the 'Antichrist Superstar', Marilyn Manson. (Or Brian Warner, as he's known to his mum and dad.) But fans of all ages are sure to appreciate the suitably doomy/arty black-and-red interactivity of this cannily designed site.



Marilynmanson.net: the life of Brian

100% Oasis

listen.to/cyberoasis ★★★★

Rivalry between the brothers Gallagher is often matched only by their diplomatic skills (Liam wishing Aids upon Blur, Noel equating drug use to drinking tea). There are buckets of decent Oasis sites, but this one tops the league. Highlights include a full transcript of the famed 'wibbling rivalry' interview which almost ended in fisticuffs.

Eminem World

www.eminemworld.com ★★★

This extensive site pays homage to the peroxide permaquote renowned (and excluded from venues, cities, states and entire countries) for his less than liberal attitude towards those of a different sexuality – or even gender. Read some of his more newsworthy utterances, admire his hair and have him on your desktop. Mmmm. Nice thought.

Ryder: hard

Ozzyhead

www.ozzyhead.com ★★★★

Infamous bat-biter and former Black Sabbath singer Ozzy Osbourne still gets about a bit: check his cameo in Adam Sandler's Hollywood hit *Little Nicky*. This exhaustive site affords Ozzy the respect he'll never lack in the metal fraternity. It even includes sidekick Randy Rhoads' autopsy and toxicology reports. That's the wonder of the Web for you.

God Save the Sex Pistols

www.sex-pistols.net ★★★★★

From spoiling Her Maj's jubilee with *God Save the Queen* to swearing on telly, nobody raised a ruckus like the Pistols, thanks in no small part to the wily Malcolm McLaren and quick-learning Johnny Rotten/Lydon. You can read all about Rotten, Malcy and tragic smackhead Sid Vicious here, together with info on the far less dangerous post-Pistols careers of Glen Matlock, Steve Jones and Paul Cook.

The Silver Mine: Mr D's Keith Richards page

www.cc.utah.edu/~dmj2a50/kr.htm ★★★

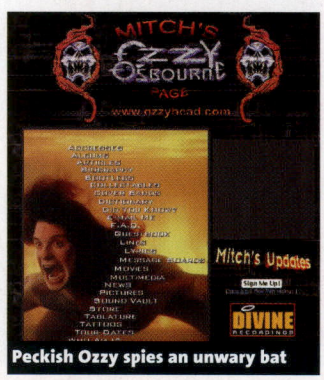
There's no end of stories about rock's greatest survivor. Some are true (he *was* arrested for weeing against a wall) and some aren't (he didn't have a complete blood change to kick heroin). Compared to Jagger, Keef isn't particularly well-served with Web sites but this is a decent effort. Marvel at the jug-eared junior Richards, admire Sebastian Kruger's twisted cartoons and thrill to Keef's recipe for shepherd's pie.

Shaun Ryder swore so much on *TFI Friday* that it is now pre-recorded

Achilles Last Stand – The Led Zeppelin Website

www.led-zeppelin.org ★★★★★

The ultimate heavy rock band are surrounded by rumours of sexual misdemeanours and, in the case of occult-dabbling Jimmy Page, literal hellraising. Whatever the truth, the songs remain the same and the fanbase, huge. When you've spent ▶



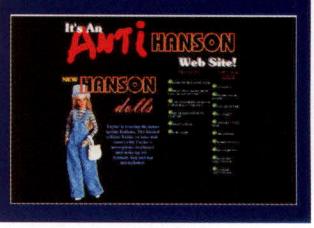
Peckish Ozzy spies an unwary bat

Hanson: soft

AND THEN THERE'S...

Hanson devils

Many bands are eager to tap into the aura of mayhem created by rock's hellraisers. Take these moody-looking Hanson boys, with bovver boots and 'you looking at me?' stares. Harmless enough – but the winsome pop puppets have unleashed a tidal wave of venom from *really* tough music fans. Take the Anti-Hanson site at ***www.geocities.com/Augusta/9364***. Webmaster Chris Mitchell was even able to conduct an online chat with the objects of his hatred. Most amusing.

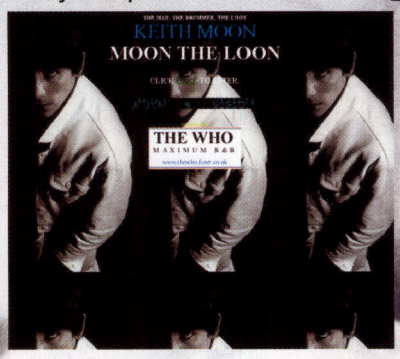


Moon the Loon

www.keithmoon.fsnet.co.uk ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

The late, lamented Who sticksman, Keith Moon 'the Loon', was as famous for his boisterous antics as for his inventive, high-octane drumming. Most well-know is the tale of him driving a Lincoln convertible into a swimming pool to get away from a food fight he'd started, but equally notable is his brick-by-brick demolition of a hotel room wall to get to a stereo on the other side. A dedicated Mod, Moonie would have appreciated the style and panache of this attentive site.



'Dentist will see you now, Mr Moon'

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: REX, RETNA

HELLRAISERS

Manson: not too proud to bite his own nails

weeks wading through this site, check ***www.ledzeppelin.ws*** for more links than you'll ever have time to follow.

Axl Rose: The Site

www.crosswinds.net/~warose

★★★★

A very simple name for one of those sites which loves to use very big, colourful text. If you can get past that (and the banners) there's a mass of info on the man who was Guns n' Roses frontman and hero to disaffected American teens throughout the 80s. Beware the pics page if your computer takes a while to load images: there are thousands of 'em on there...

BEST MUSIC SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND A BAND SITE?

www.ubl.com Go here first for the huge search engine.
www.bigmouth.co.uk UK-specific site with tons of links.
wallofsound.go.com Links and features from the US.

READ THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS?

www.rollingstone.com The US publication features extra online content.
www.nme.com *NME*'s online version has a reputation for breaking news.
www.metal-is.com The premier rock and metal site, with great links.

FIND GIGS AND TOURS?

www.ticketlinks.com Full database of musical events.
www.aloud.com Brilliant search engine for gigs, with tickets too.
www.sceneone.co.uk Easy to use.
www.wayahead.com Reliable and competitively priced tickets.

BUY NEW CDS?

www.secondsounds.com Used CDs, actually, but the price is unbeatable.
www.audiostreet.co.uk Easy-to-navigate store, with free postage!
www.play247.com Cheap chart CDs.
www.recordstore.co.uk '*The* home of dance music retail on the Net'.

FIND OUT ABOUT MP3s?

www.mp3now.com Good MP3 portal.
www.mp3place.com Fine database.
www.mp3.com Heaps of downloads.

POST MY BAND'S MP3s?

www.crunch.co.uk Signs artists exclusively for the site.

Metal-Is: for all your rockin' needs

www.peoplesound.com A popular unsigned band portal.
www.vitaminic.co.uk New MP3 site.
www.clickmusic.co.uk Excellent MP3 portal with downloads.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

Dish the dirt about the latest batch of hellraisers at ***alt.gossip.celebrities***.

GET CHATTING?

Have a natter about your favourite bad boys and girls of music at ***www.mtv.co.uk/home.asp***.

THE SIMPSONS

Yellow fever on the Internet

On the tenth anniversary of Springfield's finest's debut on the Fox network, we salute *The Simpsons*

The Simpsons Archive: exhaustive

The Simpsons Archive

www.snpp.com ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

Do you remember exactly what Bart wrote on the blackboard at the start of the 'Homer loves Flanders' episode? Are you able to recite every line of 'Dead Putting Society' – backwards? If so, you'll feel right at home here, where scarily in-depth details of every single episode, articles, FAQs, character guides, bibliographies and links have been lovingly compiled by buffs across the globe. That's how the Internet Movie Database began and this is the *Simpsons* equivalent. Guaranteed to keep you occupied for hours.

Simpsons Sourcebook

www.fandom.com/simpsons

★★★★

The Simpsons Sourcebook is one of the best sites dedicated to the Springfield Five, jam-packed with news and information on all things Simpson. However, it's a Yank site, which means you get comments on the message board like: 'If all those other "musicians" can go on the Simpsons, so can Marilyn Manson'. Okay...

Evergreen Terrace

www.milpool.com ★★★★★

The vast Evergreen Terrace has rightly won respect for its unusual features. So if you're bored with mere biographies and episode guides, head here for plenty to keep you occupied, including an article on *The Simpsons*' impact on the Internet (which is more interesting than it sounds), some terrifying impersonations of characters by fans, and a large interactive section, including those horribly addictive sliding puzzles. You have been warned.

Simpsons Surplus

www.smarch.com ★★★★

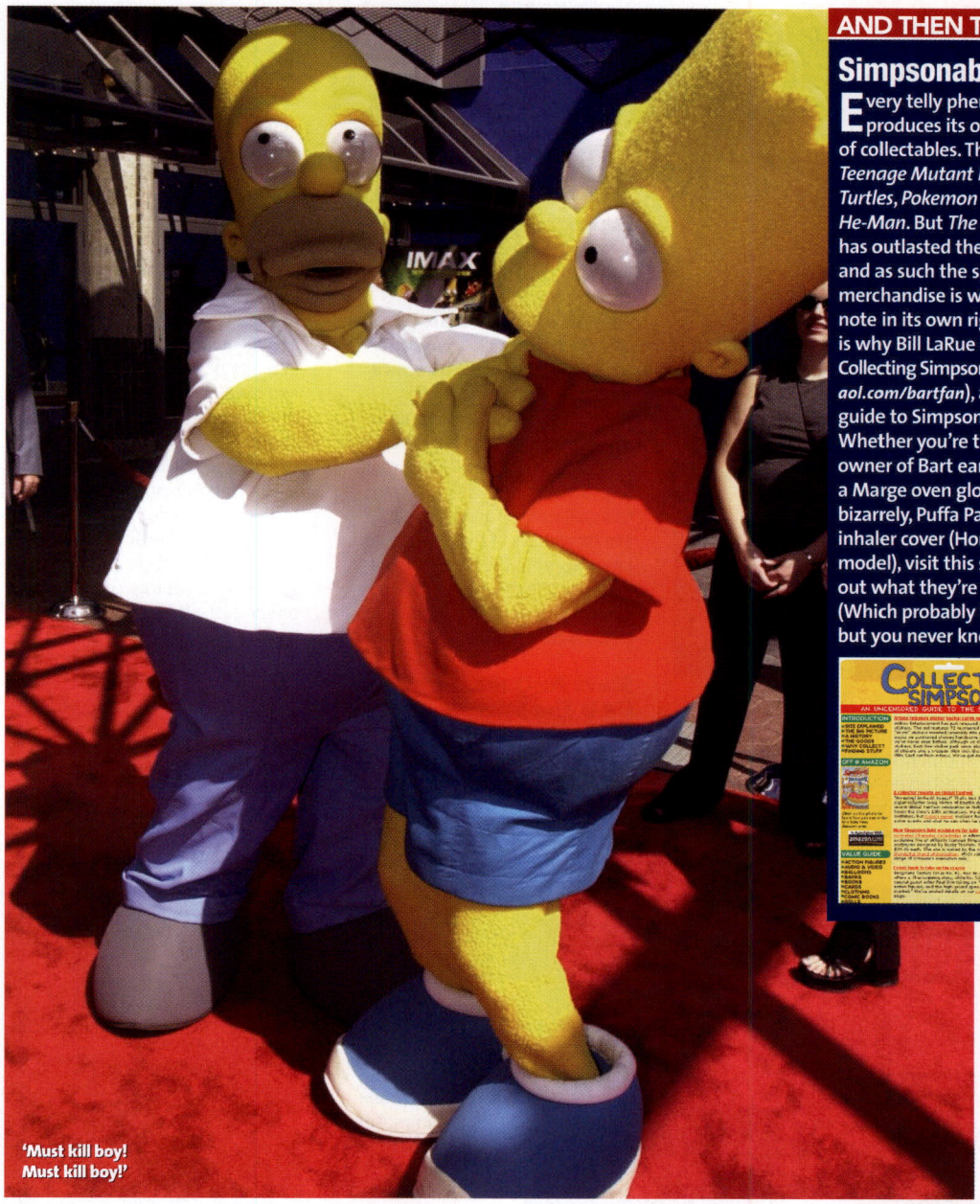
'The search engines love us, so why don't you?' queries the homepage of Simpsons Surplus. Actually, we do. Just take a look at the 'Theories' section (what really happened to Frank Grimes from series eight?), the 'Translation' section and all the nuggets of useless-yet-compelling information (like Nancy Cartwright, voice of Bart, was the voice of Gusty/Bushwoolie #4 in *My Little Pony: The Movie*) to see exactly why we think it's so darn good.

TheSimpsons.com

www.thesimpsons.com ★★★

Since its inception 13 years ago as a short on the Tracey Ullman show,

Evergreen Terrace: right up your street



'Must kill boy! Must kill boy!'

WORDS: SARAH WAKELY; PICTURES: RETNA, NEWSMAKERS

The Simpsons has gone from strength to strength, so give praise at the official Fox site. So it's not quite as good as some of the fan sites but pay a visit anyway, if only to read the excellent character and actor biographies. Well, did you know that Dan Castellaneta (Homer) is also the voice behind Krusty the Clown, Grampa Simpson and Barney Gumble?

The Simpsons Top 100

www.simpsons100.com ★★★★

As its name suggests, The Simpsons Top 100 directs you to the hottest sites for Springfield devotees, and you can vote for others worthy of a mention in the cartoon equivalent of the Billboard charts.

The Simpsons Tree

www.lardlad.com/tree ★★★★

Can't tell Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from Milhouse Van Houten? Desperate for a site dedicated to Principal Skinner? Then look no further than The Simpsons Tree, with links and information covering hundreds of characters, from Itchy and Scratchy to The Irish Guy who pops up every now and then. Handy.

A Burns for All Seasons

smarch.com/boourns ★★★

For many, Montgomery Burns (the shrivelled, heartless owner of the Springfield nuclear plant) is the primary reason to tune into the show. After all, he is the only character to have a double episode named after him ('Who Shot Mr Burns?' parts I and II). Find out more about the man and his motivations on this *exxxx*cellent tribute site.

Simpsons Trivia Center

www.simptriv.com ★★★

Reckon you're a huge Simpsons fan? Then put your knowledge to the test here (and find out if it really is time you got a life). Confuse yourself with the Daily Stumper, puzzle over who uttered the immortal phrase, 'Do you find something comical about my appearance when I am driving my automobile?', and take the Trivia Challenge. Finally, if you're arguing a finer point of Springfield lore with a friend, simply Ask The Master who will attempt to resolve it before violence ensues.

AND THEN THERE'S...

Simpsonabilia

Every telly phenomenon produces its own range of collectables. Think *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Pokemon* and, erm, *He-Man*. But *The Simpsons* has outlasted them all, and as such the spin-off merchandise is worthy of note in its own right. Which is why Bill LaRue launched Collecting Simpsons (***members.aol.com/bartfan***), an online guide to Simpsons goodies. Whether you're the proud owner of Bart earrings, a Marge oven glove or, bizarrely, Puffa Pal asthma inhaler cover (Homer model), visit this site to find out what they're worth. (Which probably isn't much, but you never know.)

BEST TELEVISION SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND PROGRAMME GUIDES FOR POPULAR SHOWS?

www.coldfeetonline.co.uk Ground-breaking site dedicated to ITV's comedy-drama *Cold Feet*.

www.corrie.net Get all the latest gossip before it hits the *Street* with this top-notch Corrie fan site.

www.beef-cake.com At-a-glance guide to *South Park*.

come.to/theroylefamily Episode guide, cast lists, quotes and sounds from *The Royle Family*.

BUY TV MEMORABILIA?

www.tvtoys.com Pick up TV toys, books – and more.

www.universal-studios.net/movieprops.html Head for the shop.

www.noveltytogs.com A great source for *South Park* and *Simpsons* stuff in pounds sterling.

Beef-Cake.Com: keeps on truckin'

FIND TV LISTINGS?

www.toaster.co.uk Electronic telly guide.

www.freeserve.com/tvnradio Use the handy instant soap update.

www.radiotimes.beeb.com The listings mag online.

www.digiguide.co.uk Custom-built UK telly listings.

WATCH TV?

www.virtuetv.co.uk Classic films.

www.dvtv.co.uk Net-only station.

www.broadcast.com Live events.

www.livetv.wwitv.com Hook up with 100+ global live TV stations.

FIND TV NEWS AND INFO?

tv.cream.org Old shows.

www.bigglethwaite.com Online TV.

www.ultimatetv.com US-biased.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

Share your passion for Homer, Marge and the gang at ***alt.tv.simpsons***.

FIND A MAILING LIST?

Join a *Simpsons* discussion group by sending an email marked 'more info' to ***hello-simpsons-l@lyris.snpp.com***.

SPORTS FILMS

Sport on celluloid

Sport is such good drama, why not make films about it? Oh, they have...

Raging Bull

www.movies.tierranet.com/ragingbull
★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

Described as an 'overwhelming experience' and one of the best movies ever made, *Raging Bull* is firmly entrenched as an all-time great in the movie pantheon. Homage is duly paid at this well laid-out site. Read the cast lists, look at the images and view clips from the movie, including Sugar Ray beating La Motta in one of the (many) amazing boxing scenes.

Frankly, it served his dentist right

On Location: The Color of Money

www.fitzgeraldsnightclub.com/film1.html ★★★

What *The Color of Money* lacked in pace and atmosphere was more than compensated for by Paul Newman's performance, winning the Oscar that eluded him for the 1961 original, *The Hustler*. This brief site doesn't have a great deal to say about the film, but offers up pics from the movie in addition to trivia: apparently, Tom Cruise performed his own trick shots. Is there no end to the Cruiser's talents?

Bull Durham

www.rosebud.com.br/scripts/files/title_B50.htm ★★★

Be word-perfect when repeating Kevin Costner's 'I believe' speech from *Bull Durham*, courtesy of this site. The entire script of Ron Shelton's great baseball movie is transcribed here, in addition to links to other movies by Mr Shelton. Altogether now: 'I believe in the sweet spot, soft-core pornography... and in long, slow, deep, wet kisses that last three days'.

Rocky Movie Pages

www.movieprop.como/tvandmovie/Rocky ★★★

The *Rocky* movies began well (the original received an Oscar nomination for best screenplay) but the formula, after five outings, soon wore thin. Stick to the glory moments at this enthusiastic site: read up on 'Rocky the Legend', 'Rocky's Opponents', 'Rocky's Allies', even the 'Rocky Chronology' (let's guess: *Rocky, Rocky II*...). It's all here, including sound files, in case you've forgotten the immortal cry of 'Adriaaaaaan...'

Paul and Tom: pooling their talents

When We Were Kings

washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/style/longterm/movies/videos/whenwerekings.htm ★★★★

Not so much a docu-movie as a slice of history, *When We Were Kings* tells the story of Ali and Foreman's 'Rumble in the Jungle'. Log on to this well-written and informative site for reviews of the film plus an interview with the director – then purchase the movie and see Ali when he was in all his verbal and physical poetic glory.

Steve McQueen: He Is The Man

www.tedstrong.com/theman.html ★★★★

Le Mans was not one of Steve McQueen's greatest films, but this 1971 flick still manages to get the revs going – and race fans can think of few better ways to spend a few hours in front of the telly than watching Steve go through his paces at the track. Although this informative site is not solely dedicated to *Le Mans*, it's chock full of McQueen facts, figures and movie details, with links galore.

The Ultimate Guide to 'Victory'

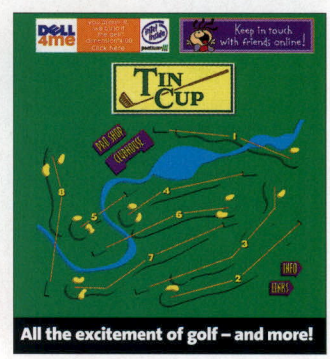
www.worldsoccer.about.com/sports/worldsoccer/library/weekly/aa061499.htm ★★★★

Every detail you could possibly want – or need – to know is contained in this thorough site dedicated to that towering achievement in sporting films, *Escape to Victory*. As compelling as watching a road accident, *Escape*... stars soccer legends like Pele, Bobby Moore and, er, Michael Caine as POWs playing a game against their captors. Log on for info on the cast, background and loads of links but, most importantly, it tells it like it is – the film is a 'soap opera for football fans'.

Tin Cup

www.movies.warnerbros.com/tincup/cmp/main.html ★★★★

This could have been *Bull Durham* mark II: same star (Kevin Costner), same director (Ron Shelton)... but a different sport this time. *Tin Cup* tried to make golf exciting – and it damn near succeeded. Log on and learn more about both the movie and the game itself on these well-designed, informative pages. Laid out like a golf course, the site has golf-related areas (the clubhouse, a pro shop), pictures, information on the stars – and, of course, loads of links (geddit?).



All the excitement of golf – and more!

Kingpin

www.mgmua.com/kingpin/main.html ★★★

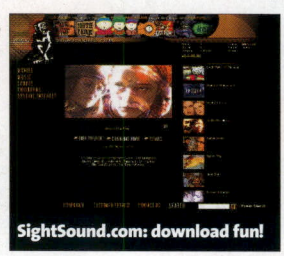
This, the second outing for the Farrelly brothers (they of *Dumb and Dumber* and *There's Something About Mary* fame) sees the pair give the 'sport' of ten-pin bowling their unique treatment. *Kingpin*'s official site is as brash, bright and breezy as the movie itself, and it also includes details of a concerted effort to get bowling accepted as an Olympic sport.

BEST MOVIE SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

GET LATEST NEWS AND RELEASE DATES?

www.popcorn.co.uk A British slant on releases.
aint-it-cool-news.com For the inside track.
www.filmunlimited.co.uk Views from *The Guardian*.
uk.imdb.com The bible of online film.



SightSound.com: download fun!

www.sightsound.com The place to see *The Quantum Project*, the first full-length, full-budget Net film.
www.in-movies.com Budding filmmakers may submit scripts.

FIND A CINEMA?

www.odeon.co.uk To book online, or peruse the very latest information.
www.virgin.net/movies Take the hassle out of organising a group trip to the cinema with Virgin's 'email-a-friend' service.
www.cineworld.co.uk UK film portal that also includes a cinema finder.

DECIDE WHAT TO SEE?

cinemachine.com Retrieve film reviews from across the Web.
www.filmreview.co.uk A UK-based review site to rival the Americans.
www.mrqe.com Movie Review Query Engine with 19,000+ films.
www.movie-trailers.com New trailers.

FIND OFFICIAL FILM SITES?

www.foxmovies.com Links to 20th Century Fox releases.
www.movies.warnerbros.com WB's new films and lost classics.
www.disney.co.uk/DisneyMovies All the kids' faves in one.

WATCH OR POST AMATEUR SHORT FILMS?

www.getoutthere.bt.com BT-owned amateur movie site.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

rec.art.movies.past-films Share your enthusiasm for a sports film classic.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?

Get info on films past and present by sending an email with 'info FILMUS-L' in the message to ***listserv@listserv.indiana.edu***.

GET CHATTING?

buzzcom.com Get the word on new movies before they're released here.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: KOBAL

AND THEN THERE'S...

Don't put your striker on the stage

While movie-goers may find it easy to laugh at the attempts of actors to portray sportsmen (Michael Caine as a world-class footballer!) how do sportsmen fare in films? Let's take a look at Vinnie. Mr Jones made a pretty good debut in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (*www.lockstock2barrels.com*) and proved it wasn't beginner's luck by following it up with decent performances in *Gone in 60 Seconds* and *Snatch* (*www.snatch-themovie.com*) – although some would argue that the tough guy portrayals were a natural successor to his football field persona. Check out his career both on and off the pitch at *www.filmunlimited.co.uk/Player/Player_Page/0,4159-3622,00.html* and discover whether the hard-man persona is, indeed, an act.

Sudden Beard Syndrome struck again

All Ferraris came with a tin-opener as standard

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AND THEN THERE'S...

The rules

The game comprises four, 15-minute quarters. The offence has four attempts ('downs') to move 10 yards or more. They then go back to 'first down' for four more attempts, repeating until they score. A 'touchdown' worth six points is scored

when the ball is in the opponent's 'end zone', the 20 yard box at either end of the pitch. Next, there's a kick between the posts for the 'extra point'. Teams that don't make 10 yards in three plays usually 'punt' on the fourth, kicking the ball as far as possible into the other territory. A 'field goal' between the posts is worth three points. For more info, go to *www.cae.wisc.edu/~dwilson/rsfc/oth_sites/index.html*

Touchdown!

Super Bowl. It's football, but not as we know it

The Official Super Bowl Web site

www.superbowl.com ★★★★★

The reason every footballer pulls on his uniform and faces a pack of angry, pumped-up opponents every week is so they can make it to the biggest game of the year. The official site contains movie clips from every previous Super Bowl game, as well as sound files of players and coaches talking about classic moments. Super Bowl XXXV takes place at Tampa Bay on 28 January, and the site has plenty of links and local information for those making the journey there.

Football.com

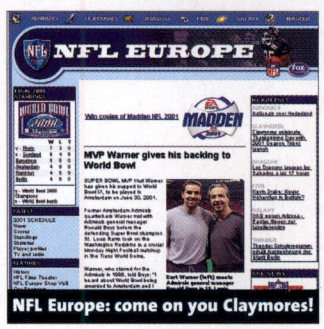
www.football.com ★★★★

This well-designed site has plenty of news and features for the ardent fan, although not as many as you will find on the official offerings. Americans being as obsessed with statistics as they are, it also boasts almanacs for the National Football League (NFL), NFL Europe and Canadian football leagues, as well as college and high school football. These include team and individual records for each league. Brightening up the site – and indeed the sport itself – are the cheerleaders, with a new pompom-bedecked picture featured every day.

Canadian vs American Football Rules

www.cuug.ab.ca/~leblancj/stampeders/compare.html ★★

If you think American footballers are big jessies wearing full body armour and stopping every 10 seconds for a rest, you'll be happy to know our Canadian cousins think the same. As this site points out, the Canadian pitch is 10 yards longer and 11.5 yards wider, and players only have 20 seconds between each play, compared with 45 seconds in the NFL. They're not that hard, though: they still wear protective gear. It also compares salaries – about $250,000 for star quarterbacks in Canada, against possible million dollar paychecks in the NFL.



NFL Europe: come on you Claymores!

NFL Europe Official Site

www.nfleurope.com ★★★★

It's a bit of a trek to see a live NFL game and there's the risk of getting deep vein thrombosis on the long flight to the States, yet Scotland has a team in the NFL Europe league all the same. The Claymores were runners-up in this year's World Bowl final to Rhein Fire. With only six teams in the league, this site copes easily and contains detailed info on each of them, as well as daily news in their national language.

THE NET'S FAVOURITE

The official NFL Web site

www.nfl.com ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

The official site of America's National Football League, this baby has everything you would expect from a highly professional operation. As well as a decent selection of daily news, there are streamed video highlights of the week's games for your further delectation. Statistics for the whole season are posted online and you can search for the results of any specific week. There's also a free Fantasy Football game for budding coaches, although you might be just a little late to win the trip to this year's Super Bowl.

WORDS: MATT CHAPMAN; PICTURES: EMPICS

For the latest motorsport news.
Only Autosport.com gives you all the very latest news on every major motorsport series.
Our site's kept at full throttle by a continuous rolling newsfeed about events on and off the track.
And you won't be slowed down by silly graphics and stupid waffle. So give that mouse some wellie.
AUTOSPORT.COM

Don't fancy yours much

Think your face is your fortune? Upload a pic to these sites and let a bunch of strangers tell you otherwise

Rate My Face

www.ratemyface.com ★★★

This upstart site looks more professional than Am I Hot Or Not? and it's got a catchier name, but you can't vote without having registered first – and the whole operation feels more like a dating agency than an amateur beauty contest. Mind you, the contestants' barely literate 'I deserve your vote...' comments more than repay the hassle of signing up.

Am I Goth Or Not?

www.amigothornot.com ★★★★

Alright, it's just a clone of Am I Hot...?, but if the idea of a parade of dozens of candlelit, leather-clad teens trying to look miserable doesn't make you laugh, then nothing will. Even the disclaimer amuses: 'Click here if the picture above is broken, copyrighted or un-Goth (BMWs, tanned skin, Britney Spears...).

PICK OF THE NET

Am I Hot Or Not?

www.amihotornot.com ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

The site that started it all. Founded mere months ago by a pair of Californians called James and Jim, Am I Hot Or Not? is a genuine Internet phenomenon – the kind of thing that gets emailed around the world in weeks. The rules are simple: log on to the site and a stranger's face confronts you. Rate him or her on a scale of one to 10 and another mugshot pops up, alongside the average score for the previous victim. You can go on to submit a picture of yourself (if you're brave enough), or spend hours rating some 70,000 fellow Net-heads. Simple, brilliant and utterly addictive – to the extent that around 4,000 people are sending in their photos every *week*.

Am I Hot Or Not?: have a go (if you're hard enough)

Sexiest Geek Alive

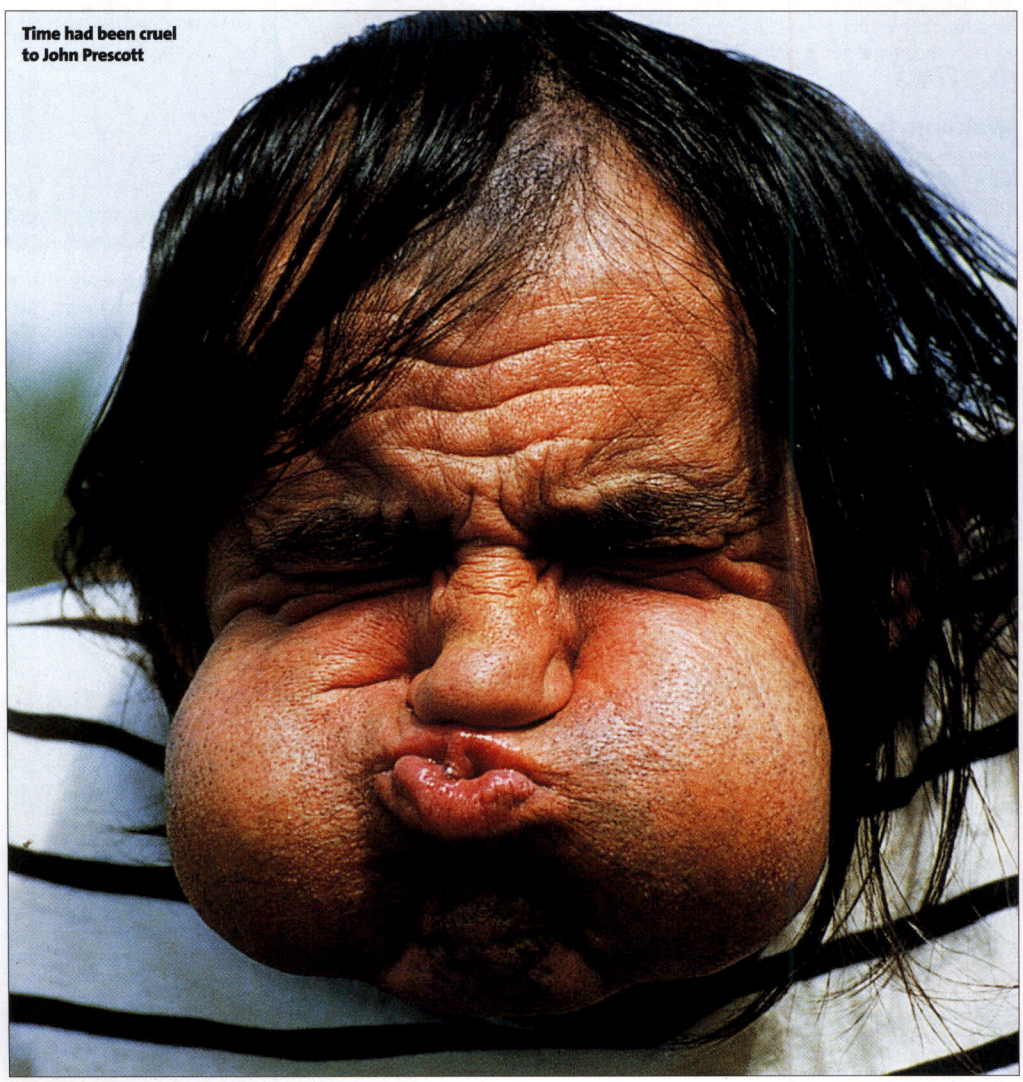
www.sexiestgeekalive.com ★★★

The votes may already be in for this year's contest – take a bow Tony Northrup of Boston, Massachusetts – but it's not too late to enter the 2001 event. The only qualification needed is a love of computers. As the site says, 'Look at me, world! I am a geek! I am sexy! I AM PROUD!'

Mingers

www.mingers.com ★★★★

Mingers is the self-styled 'home of the facially inept'. The pics might be hilarious but ultimately the whole exercise can leave a sour taste, as the occasional 'this photo had to be removed' message points to the fact that many of the contestants are unwilling participants in this online pageant of ugliness. Not that it'll stop you voting for Minger of the Week, Dancin' Mingers, and forwarding the pictures to all and sundry...



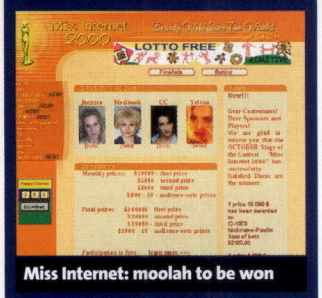
Time had been cruel to John Prescott

WORDS: MATTHEW BINGHAM; PICTURES: REX FEATURES

AND THEN THERE'S...

Mugs worth a mint

If you're pulling in perfect tens on the amateur sites, why not enter a professional contest? Women are spoilt for choice, with $10,000 up for grabs at Miss Virtual Reality (*www.missvirtualreality.com*), Miss Internet (for the 18-30s) at *www.missinternet-2000.com* and Lady Internet (for 30 upwards) at *www.ladyinternet-2000.com*. Blokes, meanwhile, could take a pop at Model Launch's monthly contest at *www.modellaunch.com*. There's no cash on offer here, but the site is regularly browsed by fashion gurus looking for hardbodies to model for that upcoming Caribbean photo-shoot. And if the worst comes to the worst, there's always the monthly Gurners' Gallery at *www.cumbria.uk.com/cumbria/fun/gurner.htm*.



Miss Internet: moolah to be won

ALTERNATIVE COMICS

Better than the Beano

There's a new generation of comic strips – online

Zot!

thenet AWARD

www.scottmccloud.com

★★★★★

The acclaimed author of the indispensable *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud knows a thing or two about what the medium is capable of. And as a case in point, *Zot!*, his cult 80s comic ('the superhero comic for people who hate superhero comics!') has transferred to the Web in some style. Telling the story of a hero from a world where all hopeful visions of the future came true, Zot travels to our Earth, where he shares adventures with the cynical Jenny. Each episode (there are 16) appears in a pop-up window, where you scroll down from one panel to the next. It's a wonderful experiment and a resounding success, with McCloud cunningly proving that you don't need some elaborate Shockwave set-up to create great online comics.

Scottmcloud.com: a stylish transfer

Red Meat

www.redmeat.com ★★★★

Appearing weekly in The Onion, Red Meat is three panels of hilarious tastelessness. This official site features hundreds of these concise works of genius, where sacred cows are slaughtered with ruthless abandon. Join other aficionados of Milkman Dan and Bug-Eyed Earl at the 'Meat Conference' discussion boards.

Too Much Coffee Man

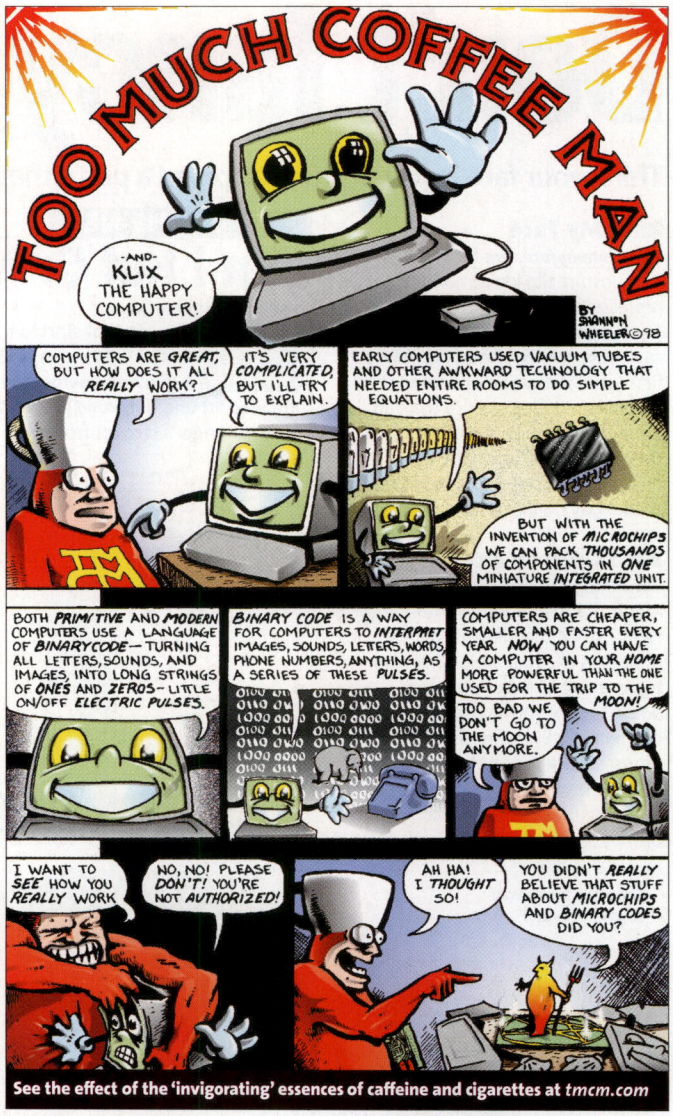
www.tmcm.com ★★★

The continuing un-adventures of the hero who gets his 'powers' from the invigorating essences of caffeine and cigarettes have found a decent home on the Web. Not only do you get every TMCM strip ever drawn, but Flash animations, screensavers, desktop themes and even a TMCM skin for the online game *Half-Life*.

Welcome to Boneville!

www.boneville.com ★★★

Devoted to the fantasy adventures of the three Bone brothers, this site has pulled out all the stops to make a thoroughly inviting community-based destination. Along with news of the comic, fans have an array of e-postcards, discussion boards and the obligatory store. Explore Bone's world in 3D, via the Cyberworld browser.



See the effect of the 'invigorating' essences of caffeine and cigarettes at *tmcm.com*

Madworld

www.11design.com/madworld

★★★★

With Madworld, Madman fan Adam Ross has ensured that this is the one-stop place for info on Mike Allred's utterly deranged superhero. This place has it all, including games, galleries, interviews, articles and an adventure timeline. It's not regularly updated, but it remains a formidable resource.

BEST NEWS SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

RECEIVE NEWS?

www.thisislondon.co.uk Capital-based news from the *Evening Standard*.

pa.press.net Array of news-related services, including a desktop ticker.

FIND LOCAL NEWS?

www.thisis.co.uk Just add the name of your preferred city or county (eg ***www.thisisessex.co.uk***) to get news, chat and events near you.

www.ecola.com/news/press/eu/uk Directory of online UK regional newspapers and magazines.

COMPILE MY OWN NEWS PAGES?

www.crayon.net Build a daily digest of headlines.

my.yahoo.com Personalise a Yahoo! page to get the news you want.

GET A DIFFERENT SPIN?

www.drudgereport.com Notorious American columnist who broke the Clinton scandal – and a lot more.

www.thesmokinggun.com A variety of material from US government and law enforcement sources.

www.theonion.com Justifiably calling themselves 'America's finest news source', this satirical mag features such gems as 'Dolphins Evolve Opposable Thumbs: 'Oh Shit,' says Humanity'.

FIND WEATHER & TRAVEL?

www.wunderground.com Current forecast for any location, anywhere.

www.theaa.co.uk/motoring/ukroads traffic.asp Warns you of roadworks and delays all over the country.

www.londontransport.co.uk/tube For the latest Tube information.

JOIN A NEWSGROUP?

Support your alternative faves at ***rec.arts.comics.misc***.

FIND A MAILING LIST?

Miss the strips from your childhood? Send an email marked 'info golden-age' to ***majordomo @maillist.peak.org*** to find others who feel the same.

GET CHATTING?

www.comiccollector.com Log on here to find rare comics.

AND THEN THERE'S...

It's only a drawing

Comic Book fans are, well, very devoted to their passion, and for the online enthusiast there's no shortage of sites. From the formidable *www.comicbookresources.com* to a panel-by-panel analysis of Alan Moore's mighty *Watchmen* at *www.msu.edu/%7Ewhitero2/watchmen.html*, there's something for everyone online.

Comic Book Resources: formidable

WORDS: DANNY GRAYDON

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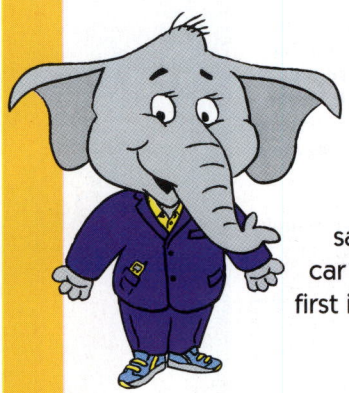

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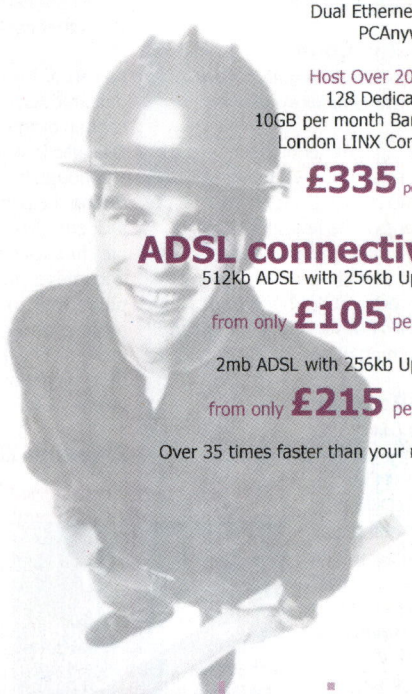

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Heroes to a man... or woman

Sites for the biggest sports stars of the year 2000

Martin O'Neill

homepage.tinet.ie/~sjgarvey/celtic/o_neill.htm ★★★

It seems Celtic manager Martin is a hero to all (except the blue half of Glasgow, perhaps). Written before he led the Bhoys to the top of the league, this Celtic fan page doesn't quite match the enthusiasm and wackiness of the man himself, as witnessed by Euro 2000 TV viewers.

Stephanie Cook

www.sportscotland.org.uk/contents/newsevents/olympians/cooks.htm ★★

Considering that her discipline – the modern pentathlon – requires skill, persistence and accuracy, it's a shame one of the few sites devoted to this Olympic gold medalist is so disappointing. There's a smattering of information about her previous career wins but someone, surely, can do something better?

Steve Redgrave

redgrave.i.am ★★

Despite the excitement provided by the coxless fours at the 2000 Olympics, there are still those who think of rowing as dull. And, given the lack of decent rowing sites (bar ***users.ox.ac.uk/~quarrell***), let alone an informative site for the nation's hero, Steve Redgrave, who can blame them? This site at least provides useful links and information, plus a nice picture of Matthew Pinsent straddling Redgrave in congratulation mode. Any excuse.

Nasser Hussain

www.zoomcricket.com/player_profiles/england/eng_nhussain.html ★★★

After England's performance in the First Test against Pakistan, it seems that Nasser Hussain and his team just about qualify for hero status, at least for a month. There is no site dedicated to the England captain but this one does at least offer an in-depth profile of the Essex player, up-to-date stats and comprehensive links to the rest of the squad.

Lawrence Dallaglio

www.i-resign.com/uk/halloffame/ViewLetter.asp? HallOfFameID=10 ★★

As part of the England team that defeated Australia, and a former captain of the national side, Dallaglio is slowly regaining respect – although his star dimmed a little during the performance-related pay incident. His less-than-heroic days are chronicled on this site, which documents his resignation from all public walks of life and prints his resignation letter after he stood down as England captain following drug allegations in the *News of the World*. Welcome back, Lazza.

Zinedine Zidane

www.zidane.fr ★★★★

Such is the balding French-Algerian's popularity, you get the choice of three languages (English, French and Italian) on this site dedicated to the captain of the World and now European Champions. There's none of this 'welcome to my site officiel' nonsense; instead you get stuff like 'my muscle pains are past tense, or so I hope.' Classic.

Tanni Grey-Thompson

www.totalwales.com/millennium/top_welshsport.cfm?ID=66 ★★★

Heard of her? No? Shame on you. She holds sixth place in the Welsh 'stars of

AND THEN THERE'S...

Never say Neville again

Haven't forgiven Phil Neville for blowing the England side's only hope of scraping through the first round of Euro 2000? Then get thee to the Yahoo club titled 'ihatephilneville'. Better still, head to *www.ihatemanunited.com*, with its brilliant games section, running ticker of salary earned by Roy Keane while you're visiting the site (four minutes clocked up £3,000-plus) and a tally of clubs who hate United the most. Hours and hours of entertainment.

PICK OF THE NET

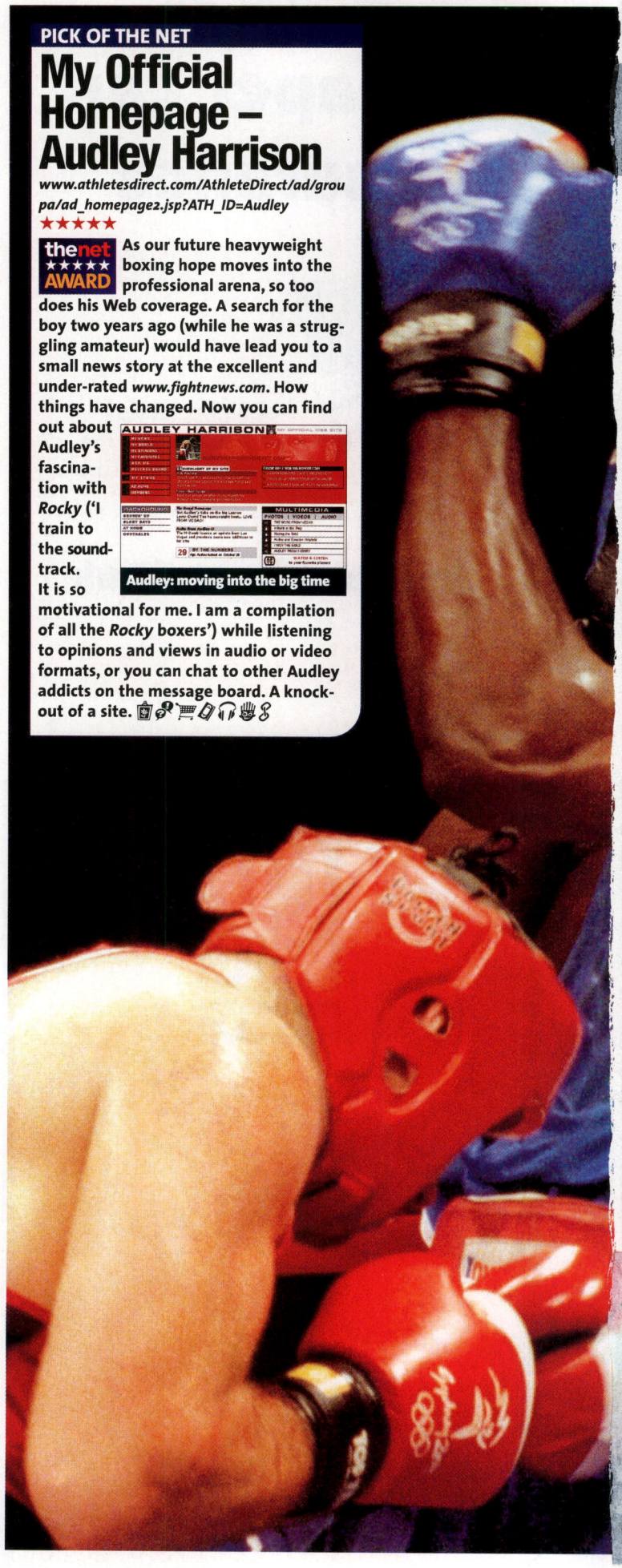
My Official Homepage – Audley Harrison

www.athletesdirect.com/AthleteDirect/ad/group/ad_homepage2.jsp?ATH_ID=Audley ★★★★★

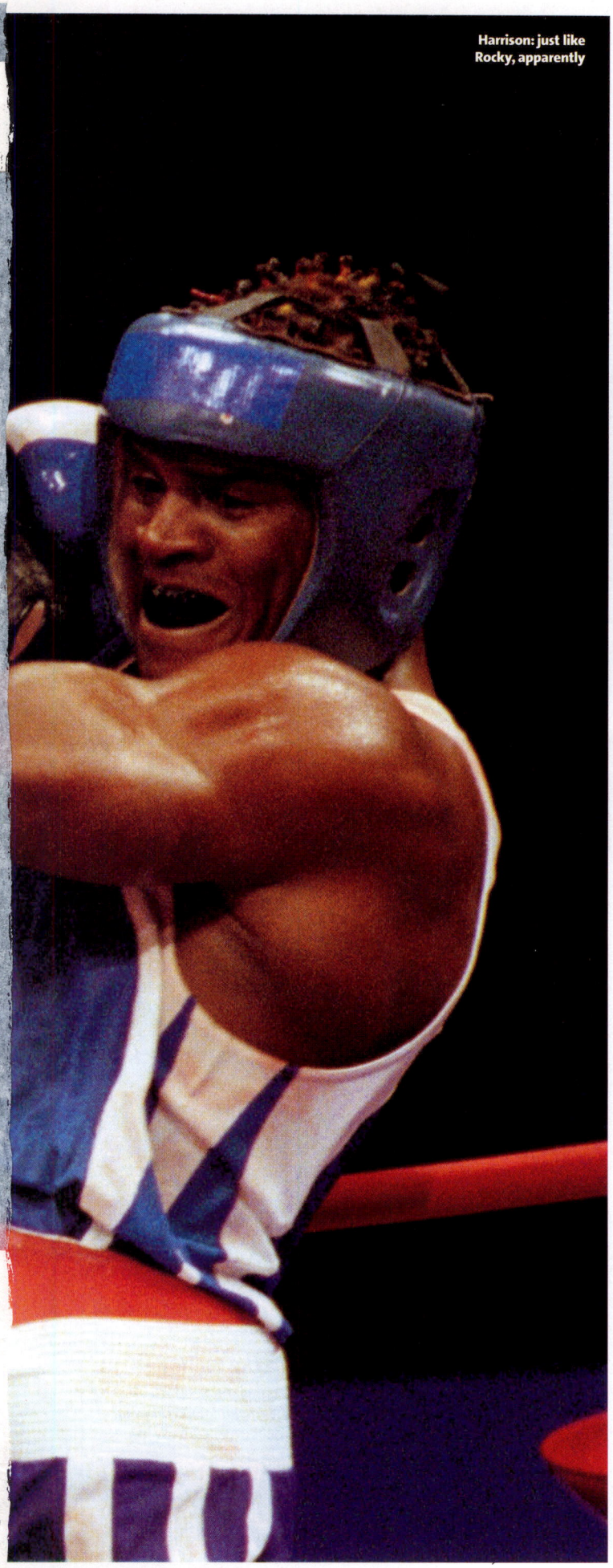
thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

As our future heavyweight boxing hope moves into the professional arena, so too does his Web coverage. A search for the boy two years ago (while he was a struggling amateur) would have lead you to a small news story at the excellent and under-rated *www.fightnews.com*. How things have changed. Now you can find out about Audley's fascination with *Rocky* ('I train to the soundtrack. It is so motivational for me. I am a compilation of all the *Rocky* boxers') while listening to opinions and views in audio or video formats, or you can chat to other Audley addicts on the message board. A knock-out of a site.

Audley: moving into the big time



WORDS: NOAM FRIEDLANDER; PICTURES: EMPICS



Harrison: just like Rocky, apparently

the millennium' poll and also won four gold medals in the 2000 Paralympics. Though the site doesn't link to many things Tanni, it does have links to the Welsh top ten of the millennium list, which includes Colin Jackson and, at No 10, Ryan Giggs. The No. 1 spot? That's held by JPR Williams. You know. That Welsh Rugby Union full-back bloke.

The Unofficial Denise Lewis Homepage

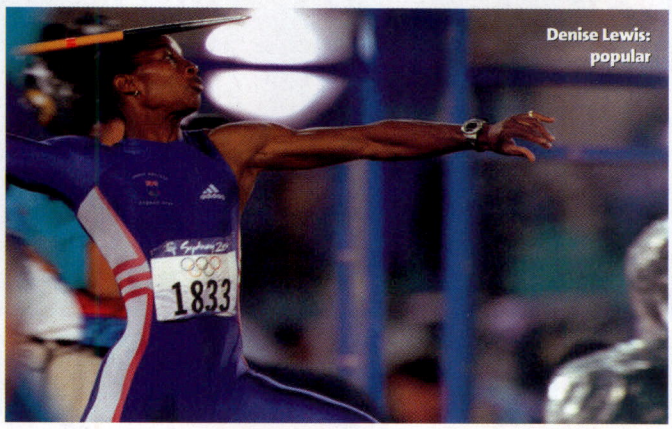
www.btinternet.com/~m.holland/home.html ★★★

Mark Holland, whoever he is, likes Denise. And he's not alone. His competent Web site has had over 60,000 hits from other fans of the athlete with the pin-up looks. It's even been endorsed by Denise herself. Good for her!

The Official Lennox Lewis Website

www.lennoxlewis.com ★★★★

After an audience with Ali, Lewis is still making his supporters beam with pride after his Tua victory in November. A match with Tyson is widely anticipated. First news of the bout, if it happens, is likely to appear here at LL's official, exclusive and well-run organ.



Denise Lewis: popular

BEST SPORT SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND THE LATEST NEWS AND SCORES?

espn.go.com Scores for all sports, with a Yankee tint.
www.sportlive.net *Express*-backed site with news and info.
www.soccernet. com Scoreflashes from all UK games.
www.sporting-life.com News, scores and betting advice.

FIND TOP FOOTBALL SITES?

www.football365.com Humour, news and plenty of features.
www.fourfourtwo.com New-ish site from Britain's best football mag.
www.teamtalk.com Club news.
www.soccer-links.com Well-organised links for world sites.

PLACE AN ONLINE BET?

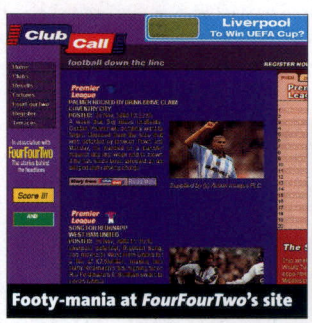
www.bluesq.com Best-known and easiest-to-use online bookie.
www.sportingindex.com The biggest spread-betting site on the Net.
www.victorchandler.com User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE?

www.planetfootball.com Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.
www.sportlist.com Guide to every sports show on British TV.
www.talksport.net Listen to the radio station's sports coverage live.

FIND THE BEST SITES FOR POPULAR SPORTS?

www.planet-rugby.com Where the oval ball rules.
www.atlasf1.com News, articles and chat from the online motoring mag.
www.athlecticsweekly.com New site, with news, profiles and results.



Footy-mania at *FourFourTwo*'s site

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

Tell others what you think about the highs and lows of 2000, sports-wise or not, at ***deja.public.review***.

FIND A MAILING LIST?

Meet other sport fans by sending an email marked 'info desinet' to ***majordomo@cc.rochester.edu***.

GET CHATTING?

Get nattering about sports via *The Sporting News* chat group, at ***www.sportingnews.com/chat***.

MONTY PYTHON

Reservoir Dogs didn't transfer well to the amateur circuit

Hunting for Pythons

Terry Jones turns 60 this month – excuse enough for a trawl of Python sites

MontyPython.net

www.montypython.net ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

Monty Python completists should clip their two halves of a coconut shell together and ride over to this magnificent Web site. With 1,050 sounds and 520 scripts online it's a veritable feast of fun, and, although the design may not be breathtaking, it's easy to find what you want. Each of the performers gets a brief biography, including a list of their credits on stage and screen. Everything else you could want is here, including a picture gallery, weekly newsletter and free email postcards, as well as listings for books, CDs and videos with links to buy the things from Amazon. There's even a live trivia quiz, where the site's host opens a chat session and asks the questions himself.

Pythonline – Official Homepage

www.pythonline.com ★★★★

The official home of the Pythons, this site boasts something the addicted fans can't offer – original content written by the men themselves in their own irreverent style. It also makes excellent use of Terry Gilliam's distinctive animation which went along with the show and was such a big part of their work. There are also a suite of chat rooms, where you can exchange views with fellow fans: these are divided into the six areas of Python – Chapmania, Cleese Shop, Gilliamland, Palindrome, Idlewild and Jonesville.

It's Monty Python's Flying Circus

bauz.uibk.ac.at/sg/python/monty.html ★★★

Don't let the basic layout of this site put you off – it's a true fan's work of art. Those looking for in-depth information will find the episode guide to the four series indispensable, and if you're after a particular sketch there's an alphabetic list of all the ones on the site – although the Parrot Sketch was deviously filed under Dead Parrot Sketch.

As well as pics from the television show and the films, there are numerous sound files to spice up your computer; and the listing of all the items the Pythons have released includes links to Amazon.

Monty Python Direct

www.montypythondirect.com ★★★★

As Eric Idle says at the end of *Life of Brian*, albums are available in the foyer. But if you didn't grab one on the way out of the cinema all those

The WI prepared for Blair's next visit

WORDS: MATT CHAPMAN (PYTHON), CHRIS HADLEY (SWAPS); PICTURES: BBC

BEST COMEDY SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND COMEDY LISTINGS?

www.timeout.com/london/hitlist/comedy.html Run-down of what's tickling funny bones.

www.whatsonstage.com Anything to do with performance arts under the one roof.

FIND SOMETHING FUNNY ON THE TELLY?

www.cartoon-network.co.uk From *Scooby Doo* to *Johnny Bravo*, all your favourites are here.

www.paramountcomedy.co.uk If it's funny, it's on Paramount.

FIND SOMETHING STRANGELY AMUSING?

www.bugman.co.uk Collection of weird funny bits.

www.darwinawards.com The most pointless deaths ever, updated every year. Hours of fun.

HIRE A FUNNYMAN?

www.entertainers.net From stand-ups to belly dancers.

members.aol.com/lromain/lro.htm All sort of entertainers for hire.

LEARN TO BE FUNNY?

www.netgates.co.uk/customers/instantwit Teaches improvisation and delivery techniques for the class clown who aspires to be more.

www.clowns.freeserve.co.uk Circus skills and general tomfoolery.

FIND SOME ONLINE JOKES?

www.jokedepot.com Searchable archive of gags to share.

Cartoon Network: adults welcome!

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

alt.fan.monty-python Where *Python* fans reminisce.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?

Send an email marked 'info uk-comedy' to ***majordomo@chinwag.com*** to meet other comedy lovers.

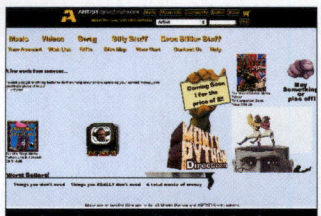
GET CHATTING?

www.tvcomedy.about.com/tvradio/tvcomedy/mpchat.htm A place to natter about TV comedy shows.

SWAPPING SITES

Swap till you drop

Exchange your unwanted tat for someone else's unwanted tat



pythondirect: available in the foyer

years ago, you'll find it on this official merchandise site. The styling of the site is pure Python, as proven by the quote 'Haven't you got anything better to do than hang around here spending money?'. And if you want to get something for a fan but don't know if they've got it already, you can avoid embarrassment by getting gift certificates to spend on the site.

The Monty Python FAQ

www.tuatha.org/~simon/mpfaq.html ★★★

This site has gone for information over style, but the grey background is a bit of a turnoff. All the usual info is here, including film and television listings. There is also a mention for the unsung heroes of Python – those extras who were pushed and pulled through some of the most bizarre sketches on TV, including Carol Cleveland, Neil Innes and Connie Booth. And it seeks to answer some of the more obscure English references for our cousins across the water, such as who was Reginald Bosanquet (a *News at Ten* host), and social issues such as 'What is an anarcho-syndicalist commune?'

Monty Python's Completely Useless Site

www.intriguing.com/mp ★★★

Not as complete as some of the other sites on offer here, this nevertheless has a good number of scripts and sound files for those who want to drive co-workers or family members mad. Its best point is the huge collection of pics from the Python films. It is also the only site we found which features video footage, including The Fish Slapping Dance, The Spanish Inquisition and Sir Robin Bravely Running Away.

Monty Python's Flying Website

www.flyingwebsite.com ★★★★

A fun site that's kept up to date and has lots to do. There are excellent postcards to send as well as games to play, such as Spot the Looney, a memory card game. News of the Pythons' current wheelings and dealings makes up the main page, and if you find yourself getting a bit mad and lonely, why not join the Club of the Divine Looneys to get chatting with other Python fans?

PICK OF THE NET

Webswappers

www.webswappers.com

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

For thousands of years the *kula*, practised by the Trobrianders of the Kiriwina Islands with red shell necklaces and white shell bracelets, was considered the most sophisticated barter system in the world. Then along came Noel Edmonds and Keith Chegwin. But now, in the 21st century, Webswappers has arrived: fast, stylish, a no-brainer and UK-based, this is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of the barter economy. Well, it's almost certainly the best swap site on the Internet, with over 160 categories. You can swap concert tickets, cars, houses – everything, in fact, except your partner.

Webswappers: 21st century

Webswap

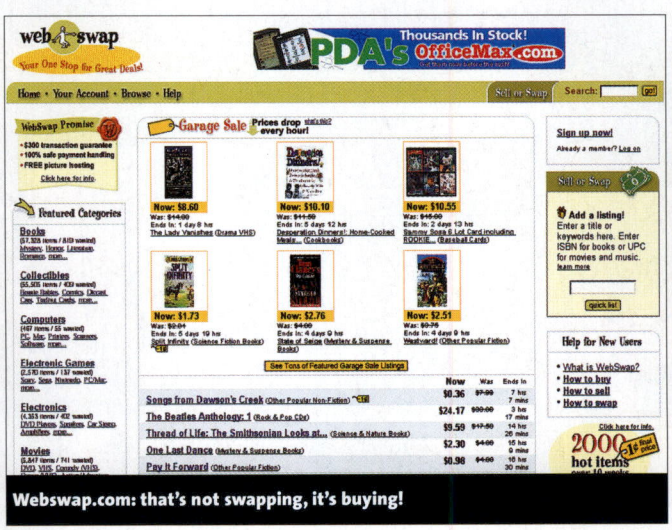
www.webswap.com ★★

Instead of giving your old tank-tops and T'Pau albums to the local charity shop, why not swap them for other people's junk? Webswap isn't really getting into the spirit of things here, because you can swap items for cash (also known as buying them). Consequently, most vendors don't bother listing their wants; they're just after your dosh. This is a slow site – even while the USA sleeps – and the instructions make things sound a lot more complicated than they are. But if you have an unwanted copy of *Time-Life's Treasury Of Folk Music Volumes One* and *Two*, head on over – someone out there wants it.

Swaphut

www.swaphut.com ★★★

Swapsies used to be an innocent playground pastime: Timmy gave you a pack of really cool Top Trump cards in exchange for your new pair of trainers; later the same day, Mum gave you a clout and telephoned Timmy's mum. But Swaphut has raised swapsies to an art form: 'Fortune just swapped a Willard Price novel and £3 for Voltaire's 2 *National Geographic* magazines and 5 Pokémon cards.' This is easily the best designed of the sites and was launched earlier this year in the UK. But keep in mind their top tips: 'If you've selected a stereo and you're offering a CD, the chances are your offer will be rejected.'



Webswap.com: that's not swapping, it's buying!

Swapitshop

www.swapitshop.co.uk ★★★

It's hard to know what to make of this site at first. Is it a swap site, a reward points site, or an auction site? Well, it's kind of all three at once, which seems unnecessarily complicated but is actually quite clever – no cash involved and no relying on people to get down to the post office. Little Johnny can swap his headless Barbie Doll for Swapits, which in turn he can swap for Little Emily's mangled Action Man. Swapit values are determined by a seven-day bidding system, and you can earn more Swapits in various ways...such as eating Wotsits (each pack is worth five). Clever stuff, but little evidence of frantic trading.

Swaptoday

www.swaptoday.co.uk ★★

This one's really just for kids, and the owners suggest they might like to swap 'an old penny for a Singapore stamp' which is endearing but could explain why only half-a-dozen people are using the site. The concept is simple: list your swapsies and what you want in return, exchange emails with another swapper and come to an arrangement, next wrap up your swag in brown paper and string, visit granny because she'll give you money for stamps from the jam jar in the sideboard... then back home for sandwiches and lashings of ginger beer.

New...

The No.1 Property Search Engine.

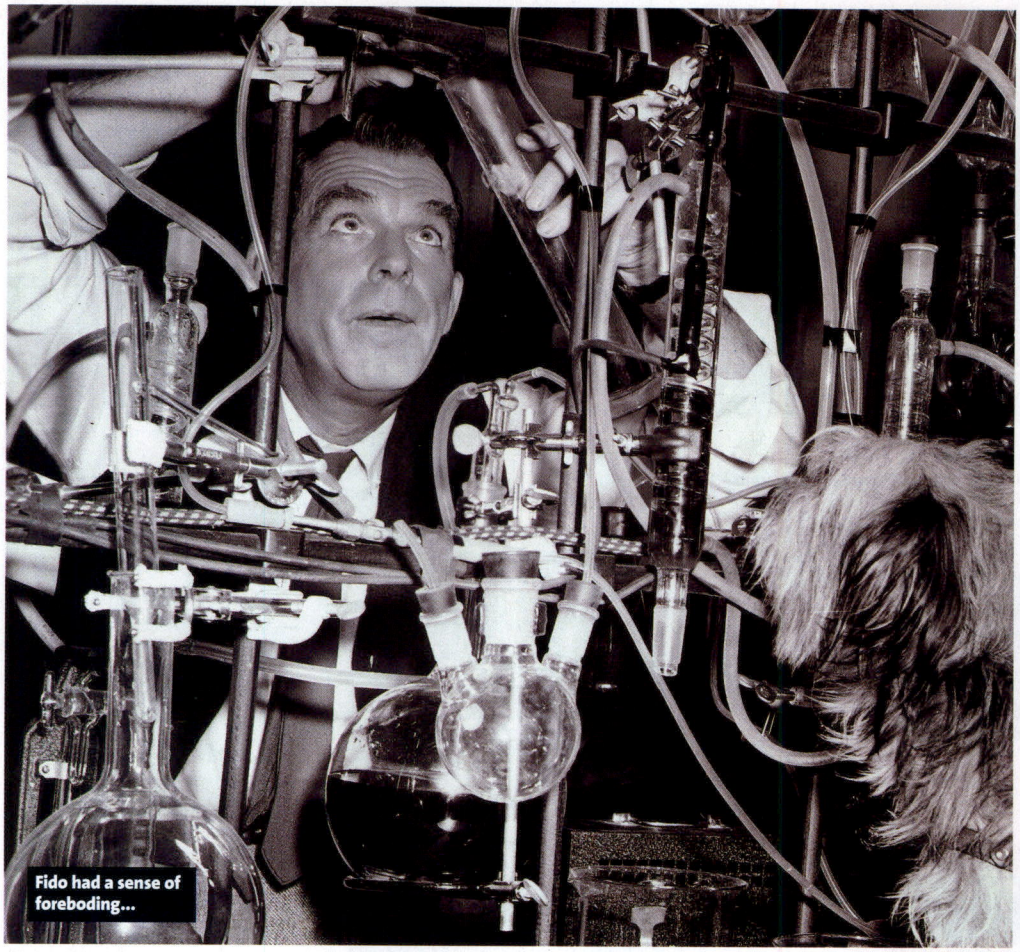
Search through 498,674
properties from
every major property
site with the...

SMART ENGINE!

COMPLETE HOUSE BUYER.CO.UK

www.CompleteHouseBuyer.co.uk

Powered by **SMART ENGINE TECHNOLOGY**



Fido had a sense of foreboding...

Chemical brothers

Intrigued by science? Then turn your hand to experimentation at home, courtesy of these sites

Bizarre Stuff You Can Make In Your Kitchen

freeweb.pdq.net/headstrong

★★★★★

As titles go, this one should be pretty much self-explanatory. If you've got a kitchen and some rudimentary equipment and foodstuffs, you're already halfway to creating something approaching Armageddon in your very own home. Experiments include the 'omnipresent pinhole camera', the 'hazards of non-dairy creamer' and the potentially fatal home-made volcano. Approach with extreme caution.

Do Science

www.doscience.com ★★★★

Keep friends and relatives amused for hours (or on the brink of murder, alternatively) with this collection of scientific tricks to be performed at gatherings and meals, mainly involving wine glasses, alcohol and condiments. Interesting fact: if you put a can of Coke and a can of Diet Coke in a pitcher of water, only the regular Coke will sink...

Hyperchemistry on the Web

library.thinkquest.org/2690/exper/exper.htm ★★★

Still yearning for the heady days of school chemistry lessons? Look no further – the snappily-titled 'Hyperchemistry on the Web' contains everything you need to recreate that classroom atmosphere (minus the Bunsen burner, of course). Includes all your old faves: sublimination, solubility, combustion and more. Much, much more.

Pfizer FunZone

www.pfizerfunzone.com/funzone/discovery/experiments/index.html

★★

Yep, *that* Pfizer – the multi-national pharmaceutical giant and manufacturer of Viagra (the 'Pfizer riser'). If you're hoping for instructions on how to add some zing to your love life without admitting your little 'problem' to the doctor, however, you'll be disappointed; all that's on offer here are the instructions for making a compass and some basic chemical reactions.

Science Explorer

www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer ★★★★

A veritable cornucopia of classic experiments for the home, virtually guaranteed to transport you back to a childhood of bubble bombs, spinning blimps and glitter globes. Anybody who's ever owned a junior chemistry set (and witnessed the inevitably catastrophic results) will find plenty here to keep them occupied for hours on end.

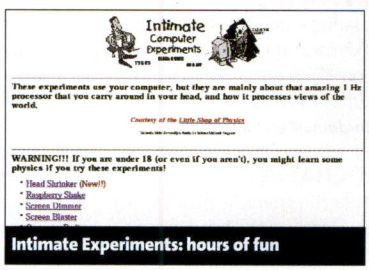
PICK OF THE NET

Intimate Computer Experiments

littleshop.physics.colostate.edu/MousePotato.html ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

Stop sniggering at the back, now. That's not 'Intimate Computer Experiments' as in the kind practised by raincoated middle-aged bachelors, but an altogether more wholesome collection of physics-related tricks you can perform from the sanctity of your own PC. Included in this ultimate couch potato's guide to science are balloon/VDU experiments to learn about static electricity, spinning animations to alter your perception of nearby objects and details of how to make your monitor flicker by sticking your tongue out. Hours of purely indulgent fun.

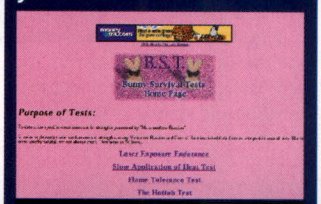


Intimate Experiments: hours of fun

AND THEN THERE'S...

'Not the bunny!'

The modern consensus seems to be that carrying out scientific experiments on defenceless animals is needlessly barbaric. But don't let the animal rights killjoys spoil all your fun – head for the Bunny Survival Tests Home Page *(www.pcola.gulf.net/~irving/bunnies/index.html)*, where a series of needlessly gruesome tests are carried out on marshmallow-like rabbits. How will the fluffy foodstuffs stand up to being exposed to high levels of radiation from a household microwave? Or being subjected to a powerful laser? Not to mention being deprived of oxygen for long periods of time? Find out here – and remember, if it's in the name of science, they can't touch you for it.



Bunny Survival Tests: scientific

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURE: KOBAL

HOME EXPERIMENTS

Fun Science Gallery

www.funsci.com ★★★

One for the slightly more technically-minded surfer: Fun Science deals not in the flashes, bangs and combustions of its peers, but concentrates instead on measuring potentials of reduction and galvanic deposition. If that sounds like hard work, fear not – it all amounts to the same thing, ie throwing things in a test tube and standing back.

Fun Science: explosive

Newton's Apple

www.pbs.org/ktca/newtons/tryits/index.html ★★★

Dozens of easy-to-perform experiments from the award-winning Stateside TV show of the same name, each illustrated with handy diagrams and explained from a scientific perspective. Accessible, comprehensive and fun. Watch out for the 'motorising a paper fish' trick, though – those rubber bands can wreak havoc.

BEST SCIENCE SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND SCIENCE NEWS?

www.eurekalert.org

Press releases of new inventions. Original sources of stories that will appear later elsewhere.

whyfiles.news.wisc.edu

If there's science behind a news story, this explains it all.

www.discovery.com/news/news.html

Features live Webcams, daily scientific news reports, and a special section for kids.

ASK AN EXPERT A QUESTION?

www.allexperts.com

Ask a question on anything and get a relevant answer.

newton.dep.anl.gov/aasquest.htm

10,000-Q&A database. If you have a new one, volunteers will answer it.

READ BOOK REVIEWS?

www.newscientist.com

The best site for the latest UK science book reviews.

www.sciam.com

Click on the 'Current Issue', then 'Reviews' for all the latest goodies.

FIND A SCIENCE WEBCAM?

www.fat.co.uk/world

Puts images from all over the world on your desktop. *EastEnders*' Walford even enters the picture!

eclipse.span.ch/liveshow.htm

Watch all manner of meteorological events.

GET AN UPDATE ON NASA?

www.nasa.gov

Links to everything from the latest Hubble telescope pictures to International Space Station reports.

www.reston.com/nasa/watch.html

A well-informed collection of often critical reports about NASA.

Scientific American: full of good stuff

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

comp.robotics.misc

Pursue your passion for all things science with other eager beavers at ***sci.physics***.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?

Hey ladies – don't forget what you've contributed to the world of science! Find out more by sending an email marked 'info femsci' to ***majordomo@lists.uoregon.edu***.

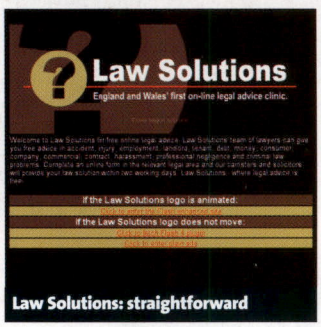
GET CHATTING?

Discuss the scientific issues which are currently in the headlines at ***discussion.edudyne.net/index.php***.

LEGAL QUESTIONS

Someone call me a lawyer!

Thanks to the Web, your brief is only an email away



Law Solutions: straightforward

Law Solutions

www.lawsolutions.co.uk ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

A very useful site, this, offering quick and painless – not to mention *free* – answers to any legal queries you may have. The process is simplicity personified: just choose from a list of legal areas (such as accidents and injuries, or landlord and tenant problems) fill in the form that appears, email it back to the site for a lawyer to look at, and you'll receive a reply within two working days. An excellent, well-designed site, as smooth as a top barrister's patter.

Desktop Lawyer

www.desktop-lawyer.co.uk ★★★★

This does exactly what it says on the box: puts a lawyer on your desktop. Simple and straightforward (why can't lawyers be like that in real life?), the site allows you to download a variety of contracts – albeit for a fee. For handy reference it has a best-seller list of legal documents (straight in at no 1 this week: 'a will for married or single person') in addition to general employment contracts and tenancy agreements, among others. A good, solid legal site.

Just Ask!

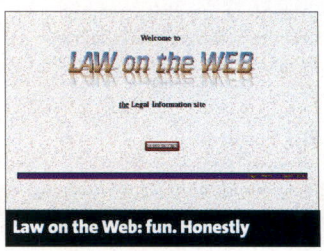
www.justask.org.uk ★★★★

This is the home of the Community Legal Service, a 15,000-strong nationwide database of lawyers, Citizens' Advice Bureaux and legal organisations. It's searchable in a number of languages by geographical area, the nature of your legal query and the level of service you require, from general – and free – advice, to the services of a highly-paid QC. It's a shame that the majority of entries don't have an online presence, although the powerful search engine will roam across 300 legal Web sites for you. Just Ask! is a breathtakingly useful resource, all the more wondrous for being government-funded.

Law on the Web

www.lawontheweb.co.uk ★★★★★

An incredibly detailed and comprehensive site featuring a wealth of information on all aspects of the law. In addition to offering free legal advice and judicial news, tips on DIY law (a selection of links) and legal basics, there is also a section with what some might think is the oxymoronic title of 'Legal Fun' – not to mention *Ally McBeal* and *North Square* episode guides. Read up and give Rumpole a run for his money.



Law on the Web: fun. Honestly

WORDS (MONEY): CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: KOBAL

all the results

faster

www.clubcall.com

breaking news
exclusive interviews

interactive competitions
and chat

authoritative content
on 92 clubs

Club Call

www.clubcall.com

football down the line

For information on our telephone service call 08000 27 99 27

Visit ITV Teletext page 524.

thus™

Image supplied by Action Images.

'Congratulations – you've passed, signor'

'Is this your vehicle, sir?'

Want to get your wheels covered? We shopped around so you won't have to...

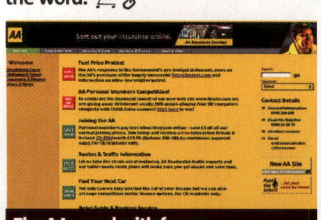
AA

www.theaa.co.uk ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

In addition to whacking up your premiums, having had a previous car stolen can make for some lengthy form-filling when it comes to insuring a new vehicle – as we discovered in this survey (see below). However, even given our insurance-unfriendly set of circumstances, the AA's online quotation form was easy to fill in and the site quick to use, returning a competitive quote in less than two minutes. You also get a five percent discount if you book online.

In the end, Direct Line might have given us the cheaper quote – but for all-round ease-of-use the AA wins. Take it from us, online form-filling is far more tedious than the real thing, so when you find a site that makes your life easier you spread the word.


The AA: good with forms

Direct Line

www.directline.com ★★★★

Don't let some annoying actor in a TV ad tell you that you can sort out your car insurance in the average commercial break. In our case, getting a Direct Line quote took more like 20 minutes than two. That said, we're very glad that our patience held with the rather sticky online forms since, in keeping with its cheap and cheerful image, Direct Line's site did eventually deliver the cheapest quote of the lot. There's also a link to its online car dealing site, ***www.jamjar.co.uk***.

Endsleigh

www.endsleigh.co.uk ★★★

The same student overtones exist online as they do with Endsleigh's high street brand, but don't let this put you off – it's a perfectly grown-up insurance company. The site says it's only fully functional between the hours of 7am and 9pm, which is a bit of a downer if you want to organise your insurance at midnight. And, for some unknown reason, the on-screen calculator didn't want to play ball for us between these hours either. But we'd still give it another chance.

Quotes requested were for a 1997 Audi A3 1.9 TDI Sport with zero NCD and a previous theft (against us, not by us!)

WORDS: SUE WEEKES; PICTURE: PA

Eagle Star

www.eaglestar.co.uk ★★★

A tad cheap-looking and scant on general insurance info – and we weren't at all sure about the on-screen fish swimming backwards and forwards as you wait for the various elements to download. However, easy enough to use and the quote, which you can save for 30 days, was returned in a couple of minutes. The price also included Green Flag Roadside Assistance in our case – not be sniffed at.

Peopleschoice

www.peopleschoice.co.uk ★★★

This site's faffy forms put us off initially, because we had three attempts at entering 'Journalist' and 'Publishing' in 'Occupation' and 'Business' before it decided to accept it. The service returned three quotes in just a few minutes and, while they weren't the most competitive we received (disappointing, given the site's name), it was nice to have the choice. Peopleschoice was also the only one to email straight-away with policy details and terms and conditions.

Egg

www.egg.com ★★★★

Guarantees to beat your current renewal quote – so has to be worth a go. Offers a six-question quotation in which you just key in basic details (age, postcode, car reg etc) but remember – this doesn't allow for complications such as claims made on a previous policy, like we had. Hence our quick quote was a delightful £662.29... and our real quote weighed in at a hefty £1,730.39 (we were also shown three more expensive comparable quotes). If your details are insurance-friendly (ie no convictions, claims or complications), the quick quote function is great.

Tesco

www.tesco.co.uk ★★★

Big, easy-to-see graphics make it the most in-yer-face insurance site around and, given Tesco's online retailing success so far, we had high hopes for this site. However, it doesn't handle the complication of a previous claim online and requests that you call instead. We wouldn't have minded, but it omits to mention this until you've gone through all the various stages. Like Egg, good if you have insurance-friendly credentials; otherwise, it's a disappointment.

1stquote

www.1stquote.co.uk ★★★★

This site takes a different approach to the whole quotation business, in that it begins by asking you if you want comprehensive/third party cover etc and other policy-related details before it moves on to the personal data. There's help on hand from virtual assistant Helen, and while it's not the prettiest of sites, it's quick and easy and returned a competitive quote that you can save. This one's certainly a contender if you only have time to survey, say, five sites.

AutoDirect

www.autodirect.co.uk ★★★★

Form fatigue was setting in by the time we got to Auto Direct, so it was a joy to find such a well-designed online application process, which moves the user swiftly along. Three quotes were returned to us, all of which we could save. If you buy a policy you can also take advantage of discounts on events, awaydays and more from the bulging 'Big Bonus' book. Unfortunately the quotes weren't sufficiently competitive to pursue, but, again, this should be in your chosen 'top five' to try.

Lancaster Insurance

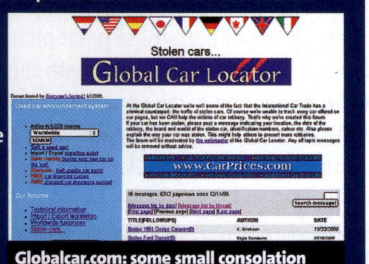
www.lancasterinsurance.co.uk ★★★

We tried to stay away from sites which emailed us back a quote rather than give an instant (well, instant-ish) on-screen quote. However, this site is worth a look if you've got a classic or modern car, or bike. We received an instant reply email saying our claim would be forwarded to us; and, true to their word, 24 hours later we got a reply – saying they couldn't help us.

AND THEN THERE'S...

Hot wheels

Publicising the fact that your cherished 1978 Austin Allegro was nicked from your drive to a largely American audience might seem futile, but at least it'll make you feel better. The stolen car forum at *www.globalcar.com/cgi-bin/forum.pl?f=4* is a sort of online *Crimewatch* for stolen cars around the world and, although US in origin, its homepage is at pains to point out that it is worldwide: 'Everyone's Invited' it says, merrily. Anybody who's had their car stolen will vouch for the feelings of helplessness, not to mention a 'gee, thanks' attitude when colleagues voice comments like: 'Oh that'll be on a boat to Asia now'. And even if the site can't help you, publicising the crime might help others.



Globalcar.com: some small consolation

BEST MOTORING SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

PLAN A JOURNEY?

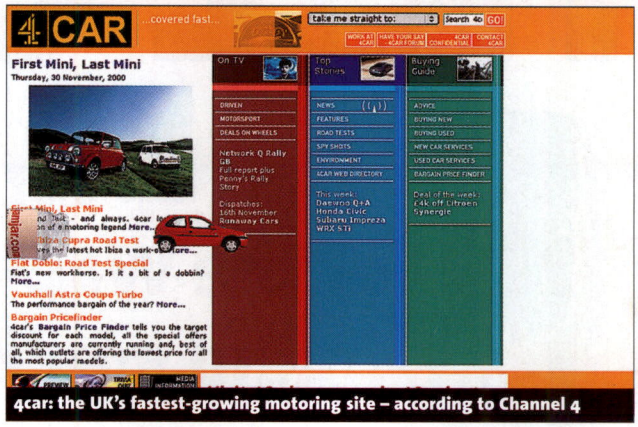
www.vauxhall.co.uk/trafficnet
Visit before you start for a visual key to congestion on main UK roads.
www.mapblast.com
Tell it where you are, where you're going and this will get you there.
www.theaa.co.uk/ukroads/traffic.asp
The AA will advise you of any ongoing roadworks.
www.multimap.com
Brilliant interactive atlas of the UK.

FOLLOW MOTORSPORT?

www.autosport.com
Top site for motorsport news.
www.f1-live.com
Real-time coverage and news.

BUY NEW OR USED CARS OR BIKES?

www.4car.co.uk
Advice on where to buy your motor, plus entertaining articles and the latest eco-friendly developments, from Channel 4.
www.showroom4cars.com
Check out the Exotic Cars section for something a little more flash!
www.eloancarloans.com
Find a car within your budget.
www.drivethedeal.com
Women-friendly car buying site.



4car: the UK's fastest-growing motoring site – according to Channel 4

JOIN A NEWSGROUP?

Find out how others rate UK insurance sites at ***UK.people.consumers***.

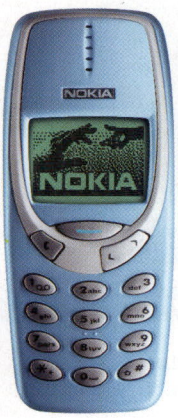
FIND A MAILING LIST?

For British car fanciers, send an email with 'info british-cars-digest' to ***majordomo@autox.team.net***.

GET CHATTING?

Chat about autos, insurance and the like at ***www.carforums.com***.

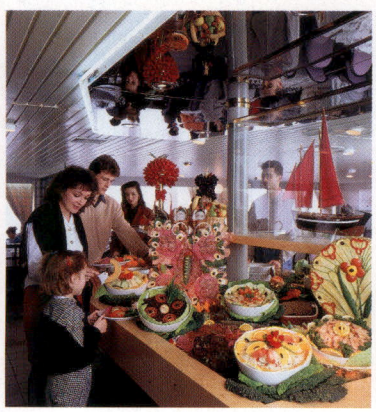
FREE CALLS! FREE CRUISE!

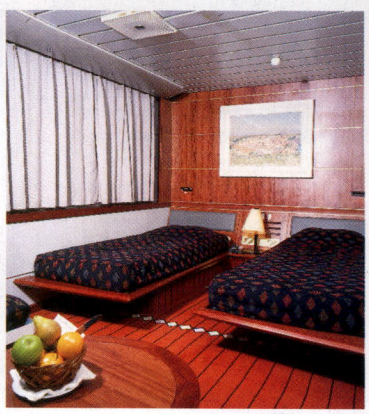


Sign up for a Nokia 3310 or the Wap-enabled 6210, and you'll be on your way to Spain!

We've teamed up with Freedom For U Communications for this spectacular offer! Sign a 12-month contract and you'll get this beautiful Nokia 3310 absolutely free, along with free connection to Vodaphone plus 200 minutes of off-peak calls every month. And if you're a heavier mobile user, don't despair: for just £19.99 you can get your hands on Nokia's latest WAP phone, the 6210, with free connection to Vodaphone.

But that's not all. In an act of sheer madness, we're giving away a cruise to Santander, Spain, for four people with every phone!





We'll throw in the cruise whether you go for the Nokia 3310 or 6210. You'll depart from Plymouth aboard the five-star *Val De Loire*, where you and three friends will have full access to all the attractions on board. Relax on the sun deck or in the ship's elegant lounges, enjoy a cocktail in one of the intimate bars or take in the latest film release in one of the cinemas... the choice is yours. For tariffs and more details of both these great phones and the accessories and goodies that come with them, log on to ***www.ffuc.co.uk.*** And to get your hands on your mobile and free cruise ticket, call Freedom For U on Freephone **08000 681671**, quoting reference 'the Net'.

www.ffuc.co.uk
Freedom For U Communications

All contracts subject to credit check and minimum 12-month line rental. Cruise lasts three days (subject to sailing conditions). Cabins sleep four people with en-suite facilities; two two-berth cabins may be substituted. Food and drink not included, and a port charge of £19.99 per person will be levied. Cruise must be booked within three months of having your phone order confirmed, and must be taken before Sept 2001.

NIGHT SCHOOL

Feed your head

Expand your mind in the New Year – use the Web to find a night school or home study course

Learn Direct

www.learndirect.co.uk ★★★★★

Hoping to study Arabic in Acton or pottery in Pembrokeshire? Learn Direct's useful search engine lets you locate the course you want wherever you are in the country – including the site's own home study programmes in a range of topics, such as automotive and IT. It's all backed up by some good tips on sorting out budgets for a course, and finding a course with hours to suit.

Learn Direct: loadsa courses

Book A Course

www.bookacourse.com ★★★★

If you've got a nasty feeling the IT revolution has left you behind, this is the site to help you find the right computer course for you. Its search facility uses a database of classes run by 120 of the UK's top IT trainers, so the standard is guaranteed to be high. You have to register before searching, which is a little tedious, but well worth it if IT is your thing.

Floodlight

www.floodlight.co.uk ★★★★

Covering the London area, you'll find pretty much any course you're after here: beekeeping, upholstery, marine engineering... you name it, it's probably listed here. The directories for full-, part-time and evening courses are published every year and contain every class in the capital, from post-graduate zoology to salsa for beginners. You can use the site's search engine if you know what you're after, or buy the directories online if you want to be able to browse the 400 or so different subjects.

The National Organisation for Adult Learning

www.niace.org.uk ★★★

Aims 'to promote the study and general advancement of adult continuing education' and is mostly a site about policy rather than actual courses. In the useful Information Service section, though, there's a Beginners Guide to Lifelong Learning, plus a list of available study grants administered by NIACE. Somewhat confusingly, the initials stand for, er, the National Organisation for Adult Learning. Obviously.

Workers' Educational Association

www.wea.org.uk ★★★

The WEA was set up in 1903 to provide evening classes for working class folk looking to 'better themselves'. It's now open to anyone wishing to learn, and runs a huge range of courses all over the country, like Chinese brush painting or classes on Tennyson and Browning. Find your local branch through the site and contact them for a full list of what's on offer in your area.

Lifelong Learning

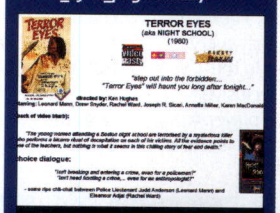
www.lifelong learning.co.uk ★★

This comprehensive site, set up by the DfEE, might be weighed down by government-speak, but it does tell you pretty much all you need to know about following an evening course and getting the money to pay for it. The site has an online application pack for Career Development Loans and there are guidelines about things like the Individual Learning Account.

AND THEN THERE'S...

Problem school

If the thought of returning to the classroom, even for one evening a week, fills you with terror then you'll sympathise with the stars of the schlock-horror movie *Terror Eyes* (*www.southover.demon.co.uk/Hysteria/terror_eyes_page1.html*)



School: bad for your health

starring Rachel Ward before she got to *The Thorn Birds*. As the film blurb says, 'the young women attending a Boston night school are terrorised by a mysterious killer who performs a bizarre ritual of decapitation on each of his victims. All the evidence points to one of the teachers, but nothing is what it seems in this chilling story of fear and death.' Not exactly what you had in mind when you signed up for that course in basket-weaving.

Schoolboys: so mature these days

BEST LEARNING SITES ★★★★★

Where can I?

LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

www.travlang.com
Seventy languages to learn online.
www.freetranslation.com
Translate tricky phrases – free.
www.ipl.org/youth/hello
Learn 30 languages free of charge.

LEARN A USEFUL SKILL?

www.how2.com
How to do almost anything.
www.learnfree.com
Learn with RealVideo tutorials.

FIND EXAM RESOURCES?

www.topmarks.co.uk
Help with hundreds of topics.
www.kevinsplayroom.co.uk
Boasts links for every school subject going.
www.learn.co.uk
Providing useful tips for five- to 19-year-olds.
www.bjpinchbeck.com
The famous homework helper.

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT?

www.pianoworld.com
Tickle those ivories like a pro.
www.cyberfret.com
The 'online college of guitar wisdom'.
Tutorials and chords available here.
www.v-zone.com/tpo/Trumpet.html
Blow your own trumpet on the Net.

Learn.co.uk: help for youngsters

LEARN WITHOUT SCHOOL?

www-icdl.open.ac.uk
The Open University on the Internet.
www.tele-school.org
Learn online and interact, too.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

Find a method of study to suit your lifestyle based on the experience of others, at ***misc.education***.

GET CHATTING?

www.national-forum.com/index.html
Join other students and teachers at The National Forum chat rooms.

WORDS: VICTORIA WILLIAMS; PICTURE: ADVERTISING ARCHIVES

WEB CELEBS

FAME WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PINBALL WORDS: MATTHEW BINGHAM; PICTURES: KOBAL, ONLINE USA

Just get a Web site, you fool!

AND THEN THERE'S...

'Retire' a celeb

Fame, they say, is a double-edged sword. And nowhere does the fickle finger of fate point more potently at has-been celebrities than Who Would You Kill? (*www.whowouldyoukill.com*). Simply select your favourite TV show from the huge list, peruse the cast list then choose which character you'd most like to see 'retired' and how. Current favourites include Ross from *Friends* being crushed by a model dinosaur and *The Muppets'* Miss Piggy being electrocuted and roasted.

A gruesome fate awaits them

15Mb of fame

In real life, they'd be nobodies. But the Web has turned them into celebs...

Jennifer Ringley

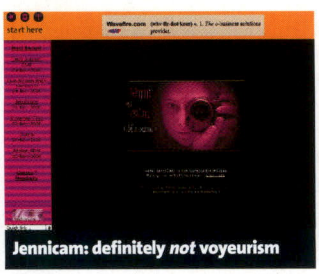
www.jennicam.org ★★★★

Washington-based Jennifer Ringley originally placed a Webcam in her apartment to keep friends and family up-to-date on her movements, bowel-related or otherwise. Soon, thousands were logging on to watch the nubile lass preen, cavort and sleep. Of course, it's all a *Big Brother*-style social experiment, and in no way a desperate attempt to catch a fleeting glimpse of flesh.

Cindy Margolis

www.cindymargolis.com ★★★

Ms Margolis' ample charms have made her the most downloaded woman in history, the doyen of a million desktops the world over. So popular is her official site that it now contains a live TV show, shop and chat room. Teenage boys have a lot to answer for.



Jennicam: definitely *not* voyeurism

Matt Drudge

www.drudgereport.com ★★★

Drudge is, of course, the man who first broke the news to the unsuspecting world that President Clinton had more on his hands in the Oval office than the Middle East peace process. His scoop, a genuine cyber-exclusive which beat every established news outlet in the world, established the reclusive hack as a major political player. A shame, then, that most of his site is as dull as ditchwater.

Harry Knowles

www.aintitcool.com ★★★★

It seems the Internet is none too discerning when it hands out its 15 minutes of fame. Harry Knowles was an, ahem, rotund recluse from Austin, Texas with (the shame of it!) a ginger beard and a passion for movies when he started a site offering his own reviews and celebrity gossip. Now, so huge has the site become, terrified Hollywood moguls have befriended the portly Webmaster, getting him onto the guest list for all the major parties and even swinging him a cameo in horror flick *The Faculty*.

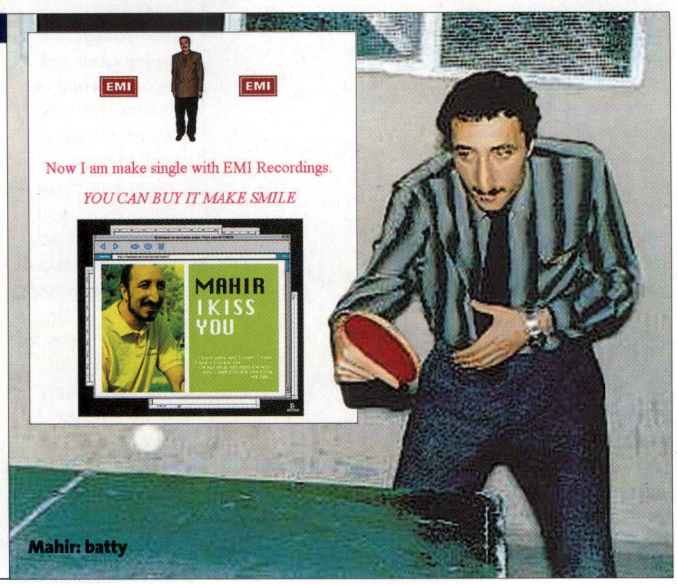
PICK OF THE NET

Mahir Cagri

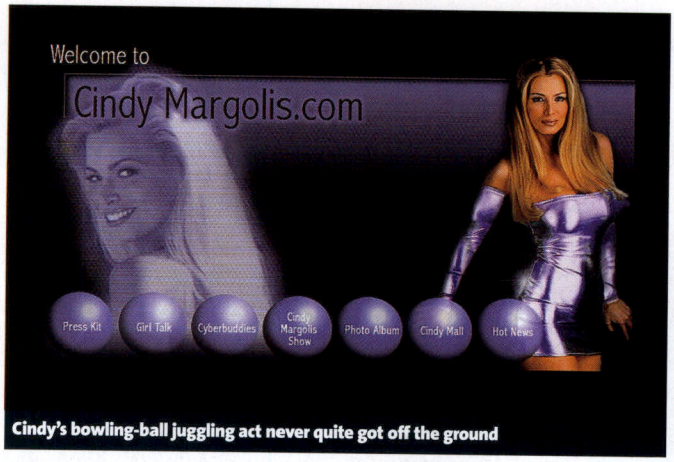
thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

members.xoom.com/primall/mahir ★★★★★

Where he came from nobody can say, but one thing is known for sure: a single, poorly-produced, illiterate and only momentarily amusing homepage propelled this 38-year-old Turk from obscurity to Web notoriety and, eventually, worldwide fame as a TV advertising star. So out of control is the Mahir phenomenon that an entire portal dedicated to the irksome table tennis-playing buffoon has now appeared at *www.mahircentral.com*, featuring news, press cuttings and fan letters. Somebody stop the madness. Please.



Mahir: batty



Cindy's bowling-ball juggling act never quite got off the ground

Walter
www.genocide1.homestead.com/mission.html ★★
It's nice to see the Web doing some good for once. Walter was merely a lovelorn American teen, desperate to capture the affections of fellow student Samantha, before he hit on his big idea: the gullible lovely agreed to sleep with her suitor if he could attract a million hits to his site. A million fellow frustrated surfers duly obliged and Walter got his girl. And, allegedly, her best friend too. No, he didn't Webcam it onto the site.

Shawn Fanning
www.napster.com ★★★★
If ever one e-pioneer embodied the new breed of Web chancer, Napster supremo Shawn Fanning is he. The 20-year-old's big idea – swapping music files across the Web – has earned him a small fortune, landed him in court and brought him fame beyond his wildest dreams. Best of all, it's exposed gruff rockers Metallica for the whingeing killjoys they really are.

Martha Lane-Fox
www.lastminute.com ★★★
'I'm about as technical as a peanut,' confessed the posh co-founder of over-hyped e-tailer Lastminute.com. And, sure enough, the double-barrelled cyber-beauty's lack of technical nous has overseen a catastrophic dive in the company's share prices that makes Gerald 'crap' Ratners' demise look like a minor setback. Try spending those paper millions now, Martha.

BEST CELEBRITIES SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND GOOD GOSSIP?
www.mrshowbiz.com The fastest track to loads of gossip.
www.celebritypalace.com Plenty of gossip, plus links and resources.

FIND A STAR'S ADDRESS?
www.thezone.pair.com/email After emailing, you can pop by for a visit – this site also provides addresses.
www.celebrityemail.com Over 14,000 celebs on its pages, from supermodels to princes.

www.celebsites.com: A-list and more

READ MAGAZINES?
www.eonline.com The latest happenings in the worlds of music, TV, film and video.
www.people.com Online version of the American *People* magazine.

FIND CELEBRITY HOME PAGES?
www.celebsites.com Links to official sites of celebrities from all walks of fame.
www.usfanclubs.com Masses of links to official sites and fan clubs for all kinds of celebs.

MEET MY HERO?
www.yack.com Updated list of celebrity events.
www.iknewthemwhen.com Meet the stars before they were famous.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?
alt.comps.periphs.webcam Learn how to set up and stage your own Webcam diary from others.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?
Meet future Webcam stars by sending an email to ***relliott@inreach.com***.

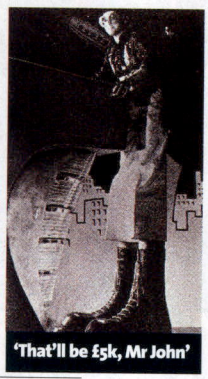
GET CHATTING?
www.webcamnow.com Chat and share tips and ideas with other Webcam-aholics here.

PINBALL

From Soho down to Brighton...

...the Net sure plays a mean pin-ball

The Pinball Pasture
thenet ★★★★★ AWARD
www.lysator.liu.se/pinball ★★★★★
Founded in 1994, this is the home of the Internet Pinball Database: the definitive listing of just about every machine ever made, complete with 2000-plus photos. But that's not all – there are tips for novices and experts alike, a huge links section and a glossary, enabling you to throw terms like 'death save', 'gobblehole' and 'wizard bonus' into the conversation. Essential for any pinball fan.


'That'll be £5k, Mr John'

Pinball.org
www.pinball.org ★★★★
'I'm not a graphics guy,' says Webmaster Scott Piehler, which explains a home page so bland it makes Yahoo! look like Shockwave Central. But who cares when the content is this good? Rule sheets for 200 of the best tables ever made, plus links to fan sites for specific games and manufacturers, sound files, artwork and playing tips. It's like owning an arcade of your own, without having to throw out any lippy kids bunking off school.

Pinball Heaven
www.pinballheaven.co.uk ★★★
Having read all about these great machines, it's only natural to want to have one of your very own. The game's lamentable decline in pubs and arcades does, at least, have an upside: there are loads of second-hand tables on the market. Pinball Heaven has a large and tempting range of machines for sale; buy online at prices from £500 to £2000 (and beyond).

The Pinball Owners Association
dialspace.dial.pipex.com/poa ★★★★
Now you've shelled out a couple of grand on your pride and joy, you can take your obsession a step further and join the online home of British fans of the silver ball. Read recent articles from the POA's newsletter, browse through the decent collection of links and, best of all, locate spare parts or find a repairman for these notoriously temperamental machines.

Pro Pinball
www.empire.co.uk/propinball ★★★
Empire Interactive specialise in virtual pinball, producing best-selling games for both the PC and PlayStation. If you already own a copy of *Pro Pinball* or *Timeshock*, use this, the official site, to find links to fellow players, compare high scores and read playing guides. There are also downloadable playable demos of *Pro Pinball* for Macs and PCs, and to get hold of the game for free check out ***www.freeloader.com***.

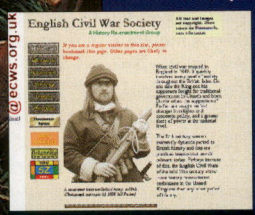
***Pro Pinball*: just like the real thing, except for the fact that it's free**

No-one messed with the Munchkins' paramilitary wing

AND THEN THERE'S...

Get re-enacting!

Right, you've read all about the English Civil War, have decided that you actually think Charles was really hard done by and are desperate to put your two pence worth in. Either that, or you fancy brandishing a musket while hollering 'God save the King' at a million decibels. Whatever – there's a re-enactment group out there that will welcome you with open arms (and a big weapon). The two largest English Civil War re-enactors in the UK are the English Civil War Society (*www.ecws.org.uk*) and the Sealed Knot (*www.sealedknot.org*). Take a look at the sites to witness what their loony members get up to. Just don't forget to remove that digital watch...



ecws.org.uk: passionate

Roundheads 1, Cavaliers 0

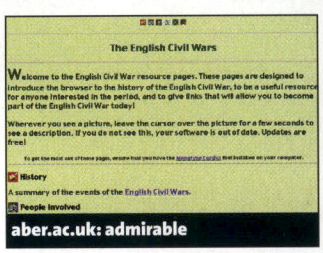
Civil War sites, from Naseby to the New Model Army

The English Civil War Pages

www.aber.ac.uk/~ednwww/PGCE/ohc94/ecw ★★★★★

thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

It's difficult to find Web sites on the English Civil War that go into any great depth about the conflict – not least because it lasted so long and involved so many characters and events that you'd need a huge amount of Web space to do the event justice. This site has a good go, however, and does an admirable job of explaining the ins and outs of the bloody battles. It even lists re-enactment organisations, if you fancy it. Useful.



aber.ac.uk: admirable

English Civil War

history.idbsu.edu/westciv/english ★★★★

If you think the New Model Army and the Levellers are just a couple of second-rate pop-combos, you've a lot to learn about the English Civil War. So come to this site for the low-down on the seventeenth-century conflict. While it's neither extensive nor pretty, for a general overview of the events that led to the English Civil War this does the job more than adequately.

Civil War

www.selvatico.co.uk/derbyuncovered/civilwar1.htm ★★★

The English Civil War divided families into factions, completely altered the structure of society and left the country reeling with shock. This brief study shows how the power struggle played itself out among everyday people. A tad wordy, but it's fascinating stuff.

Speech upon the Scaffold

www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~wilde/scaffold.html ★★★

The ultimate legacy of the English Civil War has to be that the country was left without a king for 11 years, after the execution of Charles I on 30 January, 1649. It's impossible to imagine the impact that this would have had on the populace, but to discover something of the atmosphere of that cold winter morning, simply take a look at the account of the execution here. It makes chilling reading...

Cromwell 400

www.cromwell.argonet.co.uk ★★★★

Contradicting opinions about Oliver Cromwell have raged for the four centuries; investigate both sides of the argument and a lot more about the man here. While there isn't a huge amount about the Civil War, the site gives an insight into the man who was in charge as Protector during the brief (and only) time England has been a republic. Follow the links if you want to find out more about.

BEST HISTORY SITES ★★★★★

Where can I?

RESEARCH BRITISH HISTORY?

www.thehistorychannel.co.uk Resource guide and forum from the cable and satellite channel.

www.great-britain.co.uk/history/history.htm Like a huge textbook online; concise but fun – honest.

BUY A BIT OF HISTORY?

www.bbc.co.uk/antiques A huge guide to antiques from the Beeb, with online chat, too.

www.qxl.com Head for Hugh Scully's section.

RESEARCH THE MONARCHY?

www.royal.gov.uk Official site where Her Maj will answer your queries.

www.dcs.hull.ac.uk/public/genealogy/royal Discover the Royal Family's history.

RESEARCH MY ANCESTORS?

www.pro.gov.uk Public Records Office advice.

www.familysearch.com An extensive listing of births, marriages and deaths, all of them presented in a searchable format.

Fun with facts at The History Channel

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

Oliver Cromwell won the war, but what would the country be like if he hadn't? Ask this and other 'what ifs?' at ***soc.history.what-if***.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?

If war leaves you feeling cold, warm up by sending an email marked 'info Heartwarmers4u' to ***heartwarmers4u@heartwarmers4u.com***.

GET CHATTING?

www.rulen.com/cwchat Have a chat about the Yanks' very own Civil War here.

WORDS: SARAH WAKELY, PICTURES PA

Image supplied by Action Images.

DEATH

This is the end...

We're all going to die, so prepare yourself via the Web's most morbid sites

Ain't No Way To Go

www.aarrgghh.com/no_way

★★★★

This site rounds up a selection of stories that cover both self-inflicted deaths and those classified as acts of God (particularly by tight-fisted insurance companies). The standard of the articles is especially high, and of special note is a chilling account of a fatal accident on the set of the movie *The Twilight Zone*.

The Death Clock

www.deathclock.com ★★★

The Death Clock site predicts how many seconds you apparently have left on the mortal coil. Okay, so no-one should take it too seriously, but if you do get depressed you can always cheer yourself up by checking the clocks of George Bush and Al Gore in the celebrity section.

Texas Department Of Criminal Justice

www.tdcj.state.tx.us/statistics/stats-home.htm ★★★

Did you think that private individuals were responsible for the most unsavoury sites on the Web? Wrong. Even supporters of capital punishment might question the necessity of revealing on an official US government site that one Stacey Lawton requested a jar of dill pickles for his last meal. Open government is a laudable aim, but this is just going too far.

Death: An Inquiry Into Man's Mortal Weakness

library.thinkquest.org/16665 ★★★★

The prospect of death has occupied the minds of poets, philosophers and priests throughout the ages. No-one has really come close to a full understanding of the subject, but the people behind this site have at the very least managed to pull together every imaginable related topic, from the cause and effect to that which perhaps comes after.

Dead People Server

www.dpsinfo.com/index.shtml ★★★

The title is something of a misnomer as this site also lists the living, though some of the latter entries arise from false reports and rumours. Presented in a slightly deadpan but not at all disrespectful style, this is a fascinating survey of celebrities who have passed their expiration date, ideal for answering those classic 'whatever happened to whatsisname?' questions.

AirDisaster.com

www.airdisaster.com ★★★

A perverse fascination grips people when there is a plane crash, with every harrowing detail ferreted out by the press for the public's avid consumption. The existence of AirDisaster.com should hardly come as a surprise then, and while there is a slight unease that this site is pandering to the public appetite for gruesome revelations, the general thrust is one of impartial comment and analysis.

Disasters: strangely compelling

The ElectricChair.com

www.theelectricchair.com ★★★

Though you won't actually see any real electrocutions here, you will still find plenty to set your hair on end, including the journal of a retired executioner. The Q&A section also purports to have the designer of the Sing Sing electric chair as the resident expert, though as he's not actually answered anything yet, his presence does little to enhance this rather odd little site.

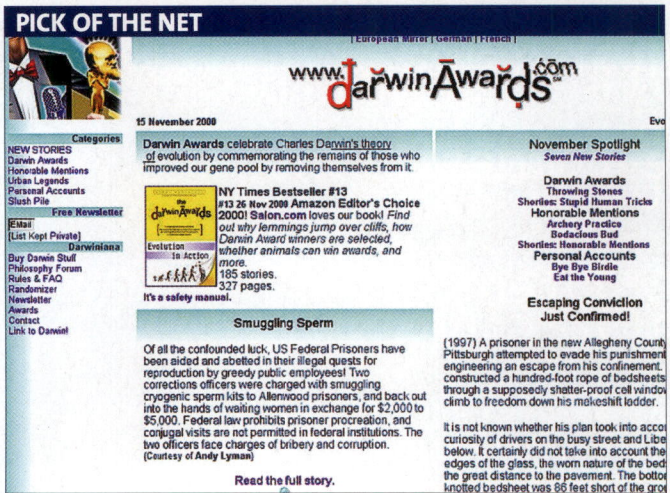
TV Party Mysteries And Scandals

www.tvparty.com/mystery.html

★★★★

One of the more ironic deaths in television history has to be that of George Reeves, whose role as

PICK OF THE NET



The Darwin Awards

www.darwinawards.com ★★★★★

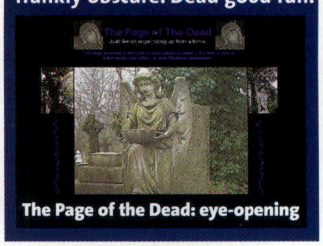
thenet ★★★★★ AWARD

Evolution has been patiently nurturing life on Earth for billions of years, perfecting in us a creature that can unravel the greatest mysteries of the universe, yet is equally happy to play Russian roulette with a landmine. This hilarious site suggests that such self-destructive impulses are ample evidence of the evolutionary process at work and accordingly honours those idiots who, by voluntarily removing themselves from the gene pool, have done mankind a valuable service. Smirk as you read tales of fatal stupidity such as 'Gun Safety Training', 'Three Clowns on a Scooter', 'Elevator Wedgie', 'Hornet Challenge' and Y2K Darwin Award winner, 'Father Knows Best'.

AND THEN THERE'S...

Boneyard bonuses

Most people would view the prospect of visit to a cemetery as an unfortunate experience, but the Internet is made for minorities. No surprise, then, that plenty of tombstones and mausoleums have been tracked down and lovingly catalogued in cyberspace; surprisingly, many of the sites devoted to this macabre interest are a real eye-opener. Take the Page Of The Dead at *www.xs4all.nl/~androom/dead/dead.htm*, for example – a beautifully photographed selection of tombs largely inhabited by famous painters. This, however, is nothing on *www.findagrave.com*, a massive searchable list of the good, the bad and the frankly obscure. Dead good fun.



The Page of the Dead: eye-opening

WORDS: JOHN GOSLING. PICTURES: FORTEAN, RONALD GRANT

For the general, it was one vindaloo too many

TV Party: cathode ray casualties

Superman in the 50s did little to prepare him to dodge a real bullet. But was it suicide or something more sinister? Though offering no concrete answer, the story is told with style, as indeed are the other television mysteries you'll find presented here at the TV Party site.

The Crow

web.ukonline.co.uk/Members/s.bird/movies/thecrow/crow-main.html ★★

Death can do amazing things for the fame and repute of celebrities. It certainly did in the case of young Brandon Lee, but it probably helps that he checked out in rather spectacular fashion: accidentally gunned down on a movie set. Thus immortalised in movie folklore, Internet shrines to his life (and death) have proliferated, of which this site is fairly typical.

BEST WEIRD SITES ★★★★★

where can I?

FIND WEIRD NEWS?

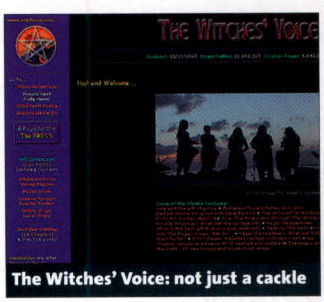
www.joeha.com/whiteboard A collection of those silly little stories to email your mates.
www.tabloid.net *National Enquirer*-style paper.
www.bbc.co.uk/weird The Beeb comes over all weird, with a haunted house and 'ghostcam'.
www.witchvox.com Discover the world of witchcraft and the paranormal – in detail.

FIND THE REAL X-FILES?

www.seti-inst.edu Meet the world's top ET-hunters here.
www.ufomag.co.uk *UFO Mag* offers lots of thought-provoking debate.
foia.fbi.gov/unusual.htm Over 1600 pages of previously secret material from the FBI.
www.foia.ucia.gov More grainy, indistinct documents from the US government's vaults.

LEARN ABOUT CULTS?

cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jkh8x/soc257/home.html Meet mad cults here.



The Witches' Voice: not just a cackle

www.mayhem.net/crime/cults.html Dangerous cults go over the edge.
www.factnet.org Newsletter dedicated to tracking scary sects.
www.religioustolerance.org/destruct.htm Get the lowdown on potentially dangerous cults before joining.

FIND OUT ABOUT AREA 51?

www.ufomind.com/area51 A hefty resource on the secret base.
www.nauticom.net/users/ata/area51.html Includes travel tips!
www.parascope.com/articles/1196/area1.htm Find a photograph of the infamous black mailbox here.

FIND A CONSPIRACY THEORY?

www.disinfo.com Conspiracies for the whole family.
www.4conspiracytheories.com A wealth of conspiratorial links in which to get lost.
www.conspire.com Sceptical tales with tongue placed firmly in cheek.
www.larouchepub.com Very, very worrying indeed.

FIND A NEWSGROUP?

alt.true-crime Truth can be weirder than fiction, or so they say. See if they're right, here.

JOIN A MAILING LIST?

Join the generally weird list from ***www.integral.org/mailman/listinfo/generallyweird***.

GET CHATTING?

www.geocities.com/Area51/Rampart/7183/txtweirdchat.htm Pop in for a chat with (presumably) weird people about even weirder things. Be prepared!

Need to know

START THE YEAR OFF RIGHT WITH THE NET

Become Internet savvy in 2001 – our easy-to-use guide to the best of the Web makes it a cinch!

SHOPPING Everything's coming up Coppernob; the shopping Web site (*www.coppernobshopping.com*) offers top exclusives

BANKING
Online banks
Abbey National
www.abbeynational.co.uk
Alliance & Leicester
www.alliance-leicester.co.uk
Barclays ***www.barclays.co.uk***
Co-operative Bank
www.co-operativebank.co.uk
Direct Line ***www.directline.com***
Egg ***www.egg.co.uk***
First Direct ***www.firstdirect.co.uk***
First-e ***www.first-e.com***
Halifax ***www.halifax-online.co.uk***
HSBC ***www.banking.hsbc.co.uk***
Lloyds TSB ***www.lloydstsb.co.uk***
Nationwide ***www.nationwide.co.uk***
Natwest ***www.nwolb.co.uk***
Royal Bank Of Scotland
www.royalbankscot.co.uk
Smile ***www.smile.co.uk***
Virgin Direct
www.virgin-direct.co.uk

CLASSIFIEDS
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Eureka-net ***www.eureka-net.co.uk***
JJ Electronic Plaza Classifieds
www.jjplaza.com/onlinead
Localads ***www.localads.net***
London's Classifieds
www.classifieds-free.net
LOOT ***www.loot.com***
netTRADER ***www.nettrader.co.uk***
Reel Exchange
www.reelexchange.co.uk
Sellitnet ***www.sellitnet.com***

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ICQ ***www.icq.com***
Memoware ***www.memoware.com***
Microsoft ***www.microsoft.com***
Real Player ***www.real.com***
Shareware ***www.download.com***
Shockwave ***www.shockwave.com***
ZDNet ***www.hotfiles.com***

ENCYCLOPEDIAS
Encarta ***encarta.msn.com***
Encyclopedia Britannica
www.britannica.com
Encyclopedia.com
www.encyclopedia.com
Funk and Wagnalls
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Hutchinson Encyclopedia
www.bt-ern.co.uk/helicon
Illustrated Library
www.illustratedlibrary.com

FOOD & DRINK
e-licious ***www.e-licious.co.uk***
Meals For You ***www.mealsforyou.com***
RecipeWeb.co.uk
www.recipeweb.co.uk
Restaurants.co.uk
www.restaurants.co.uk
RoomService ***www.roomservice.co.uk***
Sainsbury's ***www.tasteforlife.co.uk***
Thorntons ***www.thorntons.co.uk***
Toptable ***www.toptable.co.uk***
Uncorked ***www.uncorked.co.uk***

ARTHURSBAR.COM
www.arthursbar.com
This new site promises to make wine connoisseurs out of us all! Shying away from boring plonk, ArthursBar offers speciality wines and spirits with next day delivery and loyalty points, too.

GAMES
Guides & companies
Dreamcast ***www.dreamcast.com***
Future Games Network
www.fgnetwork.com
GameCenter ***www.gamecenter.com***
Gamers.com ***www.gamers.com***
GameSpot ***www.gamespot.com***
GameSpyder ***www.gamespyder.com***
GameStats ***www.gamestats.com***
MacGaming
www.maccentral.com/games
MultiPlayer ***www.multiplayer.com***
Nintendo ***www.nintendo.com***
PlayStation ***www.playstation.com***
Sega ***www.sega-europe.com***
Total Video Games
www.totalvideogames.com

GENEALOGY
British Ancestral Research
www.brit-a-r.demon.co.uk
British Heraldic Institute
www.kwtelecom.com/heraldry
Family Search ***www.familysearch.com***
Genealogy Research Source
www.genealogy.bookpub.net
Public Record Office
www.pro.gov.uk
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***

GOVERNMENT
Britain
10 Downing Street
www.number-10.gov.uk
Arts Council ***www.artscouncil.org.uk***
British Monarchy ***www.royal.gov.uk***
Department for Culture, Media and Sport ***www.culture.gov.uk***
Dept of Health ***www.doh.gov.uk***
Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions
www.detr.gov.uk
Ministry of Defence ***www.mod.uk***
Open.gov.uk ***www.open.gov.uk***
Scottish Parliament
www.scotland.gov.uk
Welsh Assembly ***www.wales.gov.uk***

The World
Australia ***www.fed.gov.au***
China ***www.gov.cn***
European Commission ***europa.eu.int***
France ***www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr***
Germany ***www.bundesregierung.de***
Russia ***www.gov.ru***
United Nations ***www.un.org***
United States ***www.whitehouse.gov***

HEALTH
Doctors & diagnosis
Ask Dr Weil ***cgi.pathfinder.com/drweil***
Ask The Doc ***www.ask-the-doc.com***

BackCare ***www.backpain.org***
British Dental Association
www.bda-dentistry.org.uk
British Medical Journal***www.bmj.com***
The Brompton Dental Clinic
www.mercuryfree.co.uk
Healthy Ideas ***www.healthyideas.com***
MedRef ***www.medscout.com***
Mental Health
www.mentalhealth.com
NetDoctor ***www.netdoctor.co.uk***
Patient ***www.patient.co.uk***

Support & information

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Alzheimer's Disease Society
www.alzheimers.org.uk
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cancer Bacup
www.cancerbacup.org.uk
Centre For Online Addiction
netaddiction.com
Diabetes UK ***www.diabetic.org.uk***
Don't Smoke ***www.dontsmoke.com***
Fitness Online
www.fitnessonline.com
HIV/AIDS Information & Links
www.brad.ac.uk/staff/ijhodgson/hivlinks.htm
National Meningitis Trust
www.meningitis-trust.org.uk
Natural Naturally
www.naturalnaturally.com
Smoking: Don't Give Up Giving Up
www.givingupsmoking.co.uk
ThinkNatural.com
www.thinknatural.com

HOMES

Estate agents

Bushells ***www.bushells.com***
Chancellors ***www.chancellors.co.uk***
CityLet ***www.citylet.com***
Cluttons Daniel Smith
www.cluttons.com
Foxtons ***www.foxtons.co.uk***
Friend & Falcke
www.friendandfalcke.co.uk
Goldschmidt Howland
www.goldschmidt-howland.co.uk
Hamptons ***www.hamptons.co.uk***
John D. Wood ***www.johndwood.co.uk***
Knight Frank ***www.knightfrank.co.uk***
Strutt & Parker
www.struttandparker.co.uk
Your Move ***www.your-move.co.uk***

Property finders

Accommodation Directory
www.accommodation.com
Assertahome ***www.assertahome.com***
Bamboo Avenue
www.bambooavenue.com
Easier.co.uk ***www.easier.co.uk***
Global Resident
www.globalresident.com
HomeDirectory
www.homedirectory.com
Homefile UK
www.homefileuk.co.uk
Home Free Home
www.homefreehome.co.uk
Homepages ***www.homepages.co.uk***
Home Sale ***www.home-sale.co.uk***
HomeSight ***www.homesight.co.uk***

BEEB.COM – BBC GOOD HOMES
www.goodhomes.beeb.com
The stress of moving house is up there with the worst of them (death, getting fired, etc) but Auntie Beeb's here to help. Providing a list of properties, mortgage lenders and decorative tips, it almost makes buying a new home fun.

Home to Home
www.home-to-home.co.uk
HouseNet ***www.housenet.co.uk***
Internet Property Finder
www.propertyfinder.co.uk
Lets Direct ***www.letsdirect.co.uk***
Pavilions of Splendour
www.heritage.co.uk
Property Sight
www.property-sight.co.uk
Propwatch ***www.propwatch.com***
UK Property Gold ***www.ukpg.co.uk***

HUMOUR

Comedy Online
www.comedyonline.co.uk
Comics.com ***www.comics.com***
Comedy Zone ***www.comedy-zone.net***
Cyber Comedian
webtamers.com/comedian.html
Funplanet ***www.funplanet.co.uk***
Funny ***www.funny.co.uk***
G-Wizz ***www.g-wizz.net***
JokeDepot ***www.jokedepot.com***
JokePost ***www.jokepost.com***
Jongleurs ***www.jongleurs.com***
The Onion ***www.theonion.com***
Percy the Chicken
www.percythechicken.com
South Park ***www.comedycentral.com***
TV Go Home ***www.tvgohome.com***
Uproar ***www.uproar.com***
Whatever ***www.whatever.uk.com***

JOBS

Employment Agencies

Agency Central
www.agencycentral.co.uk
Brook Street ***www.brookstreet.co.uk***
Independent Appointments
www.indappts.co.uk
Manpower ***www.manpower.co.uk***
Reed ***www.reed.co.uk***

Job searches

Brilliant Careers
brilliantcareers.channel4.com
Expat Network
www.expatnetwork.co.uk
Fish4Jobs ***www.fish4jobs.co.uk***
Gradunet ***www.gradunet.co.uk***
Guardian ***www.jobsunlimited.co.uk***
Jobsearch UK ***www.jobsearch.co.uk***
Jobsin ***www.jobsin.co.uk***
Jobsite ***www.jobsite.co.uk***
MonsterBoard ***www.monster.co.uk***
Overseas Jobs ***www.overseasjobs.com***
Personnelnet ***www.personnelnet.com***
Stepstone ***www.stepstone.co.uk***
Total Jobs ***www.totaljobs.com***
Wide Eyes ***www.wideyes.com***
Yelcom ***www.yelcom.com***

KIDS

0-8

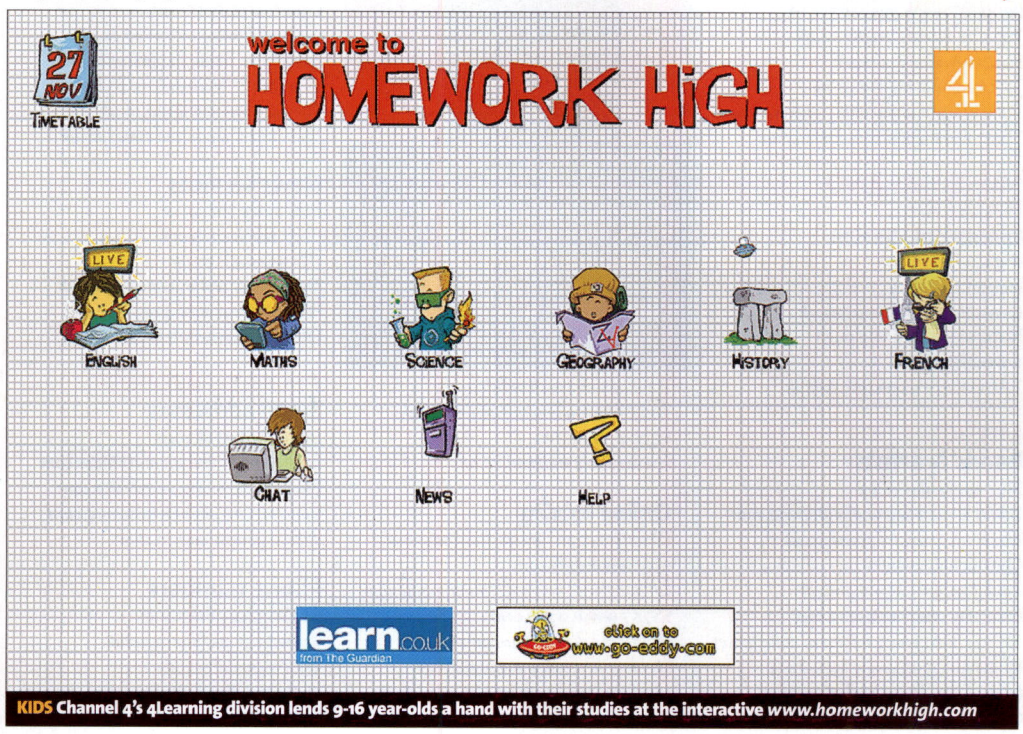
Babynames.com
www.babynames.com
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Bedtime stories
www.home-office-mall.com/bedtime-story
Cartoon Network
www.cartoonnetwork.co.uk
CITV ***www.citv.co.uk***
Fox Kids ***www.foxkids.co.uk***
FunSchool
www.funschool.com
Kidscom
www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/mouse.html
Mother & Baby
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Nickelodeon ***www.nickjr.com***
Sesame Street
www.sesamestreet.com/preschool

8 plus

AJ Kids ***www.ajkids.com***
Anything!Student
www.anythingstudent.com
Atkidz.com ***www.atkidz.com***
ChildU ***www.childu.com***
Club-Z ***www.club-z.com***
Disney.co.uk ***www.disney.co.uk***
EduWeb ***www.eduweb.co.uk***
Family Education
www.familyeducation.com
BJ Pinchbeck Homework Helper
www.bjpinchbeck.com
Pupiline.net ***www.pupiline.net***
S-Cool! ***www.s-cool.co.uk***
StudentUK ***www.studentuk.com***
Teen Advice ***www.teenadvice.net***
Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
Thunk ***www.thunk.com***
Wizziwiz.co.uk
www.wizziwiz.co.uk
Yahooligans ***www.yahooligans.com***

LAW

Cyberlawyer
cyberlawyer.city2000.com
Desktop Lawyer
www.desktoplawyer.freeserve.net
Divorce Online
www.divorce-online.co.uk
Law Rights
www.lawright.co.uk
Law Solutions
www.lawsolutions.co.uk



KIDS Channel 4's 4Learning division lends 9-16 year-olds a hand with their studies at the interactive *www.homeworkhigh.com*

Legaldocs ***www.legaldocs.com***
UK Law Online
www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn

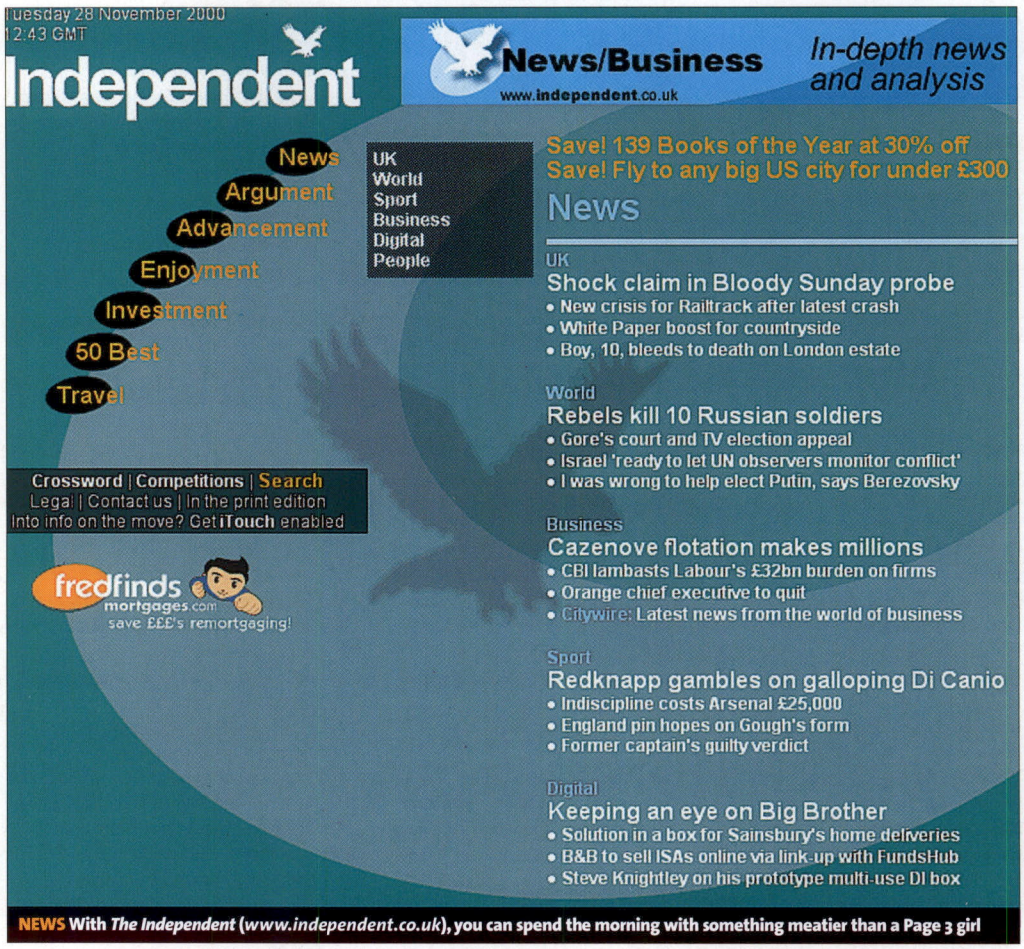
MAGAZINES
Online mags
Foocha ***www.foocha.com***
Garbled Communications UK
www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Show/1322
Salon ***www.salon.com***
Seven ***www.sevenmag.com***
Slate ***www.slate.com***
Suck ***www.suck.com***

MONEY
Financial & investment guides
Citywire ***www.citywire.co.uk***
DigitalLook.com
www.finance.digitallook.com
Eye4Money ***www.eye4money.com***
Financial Times ***www.ft.com***
Interactive Investor ***www.iii.co.uk***
Money Unlimited
www.moneyunlimited.co.uk
Motley Fool ***www.fool.co.uk***
Sharepages ***www.sharepages.com***
Stocktrade ***www.stocktrade.co.uk***
TaxAssist Direct Ltd
www.taxassist.co.uk

MOTORING
Car manufacturers
Audi ***www.audi.co.uk***
BMW ***www.bmw.co.uk***
Citroen ***www.citroen.co.uk***
Ferrari ***www.ferrari.it***
Fiat ***www.fiat.co.uk***
Ford ***www.ford.co.uk***
Honda ***www.honda.co.uk***
Jaguar ***www.jaguarcars.com***
Lotus ***www.lotuscars.co.uk***
Mazda ***www.mazda.co.uk***
Mercedes-Benz
www.mercedes-benz.co.uk
Nissan ***www.nissan-europe.com***
Peugeot ***www.peugeot.co.uk***
Porsche ***www.porsche.co.uk***
Rover ***www.rover.co.uk***
Toyota ***www.toyota.co.uk***
Volkswagen ***www.volkswagen.co.uk***
Volvo ***www.volvocars.volvo.co.uk***

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES
Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk
National Gallery
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Natural History Museum
www.nhm.ac.uk
Tate Gallery ***www.tate.org.uk***

MUSIC
Bands & artists
Blur ***www.blur.co.uk***
David Bowie ***www.davidbowie.com***
Boyzone ***www.boyzone.co.uk***
Chemical Brothers
musicfanclubs.org/chemical
Coldplay ***www.coldplay.com***
Fatboy Slim ***www.normancook.cjb.net***
Kylie Minogue ***www.kylie.com***
Macy Gray ***www.macygray.com***
Oasis ***www.oasisinet.com***



NEWS With *The Independent* (*www.independent.co.uk*), you can spend the morning with something meatier than a Page 3 girl

Prince ***www.love4oneanother.com***
REM ***www.remhq.com***
Spice Girls ***superspice.hypermart.net***
Stereophonics
www.stereophonics.co.uk

DESTINY'S CHILD
www.destinyschild.com
At time of writing, top-selling R&B act, Destiny's Child, was revelling in the number one slot in the UK singles chart with their *Charlie's Angels* track, *Independent Women*.

Travis ***www.travisonline.com***
Radiohead ***www.radiohead.co.uk***
Robbie Williams
www.robbiewilliams.co.uk

Online mixing
DJSounds.com ***www.djsounds.com***
eJay ***www.ejay.com***
Getoutthere ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***
SS7X7 ***www.ss7x7.com***
Hobomusic ***www.hobomusic.com***
Mouse Jam ***www.mousejam.com***
Modified ***www.cix.co.uk/~modified***
Home Recording
www.homerecording.com
Scratch It ***www.turntable.de***

NEWS
Newspapers
Telegraph
www.telegraph.co.uk
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www.newsoftheworld.com
Guardian Unlimited
www.guardianunlimited.co.uk
MegaStar ***www.megastar.co.uk***
The Mirror ***www.mirror.co.uk***
The Sun ***www.thesun.co.uk***
The Times ***www.the-times.co.uk***

News services
BBC ***news.bbc.co.uk***
CNN ***www.cnn.com***
ITN ***www.itn.co.uk***
NewsNow ***www.newsnow.co.uk***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
Reuters ***www.reuters.com/news***

PEOPLE FINDERS
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Bigfoot ***bigfoot.com***
EmailFinder ***www.emailfinder.com***
People Site ***www.peoplesite.com***
WhoWhere ***www.whowhere.com***
Yahoo ***people.yahoo.com***

Phone numbers
BT Directory Enquiries
www.bt.co.uk/phonenetuk
Thomson Directories
www.thomweb.co.uk
Yellow Pages
www.yell.co.uk

RADIO
Stations & directories
BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk/radio***
Live Radio ***www.live-radio.net***
MIT List Of Radio Stations
wmbr.mit.edu/stations/list.html
Radio Now ***www.radionow.co.uk***
Spinner ***www.spinner.com***
StormLive ***www.stormlive.com***
TalkSport ***www.talksport.net***
Virgin Radio ***www.virginradio.co.uk***

SCIENCE
News & updates
BBC Science ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm***
Eureka Alert ***www.eurekalert.org***
NASA ***science.nasa.gov***
WhyFiles ***whyfiles.news.wisc.edu***

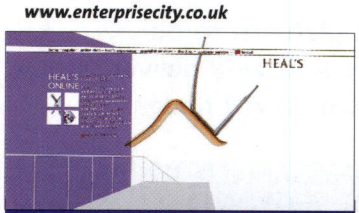
SEARCH ENGINES
AltaVista ***www.altavista.digital.com***
Ask Jeeves ***www.askjeeves.com***
Dogpile ***www.dogpile.com***
Electric Library ***www.elibrary.com***
FAST ***alltheweb.com***
Google ***www.google.com***
HotBot ***www.hotbot.com***
Inter-Change ***www.inter-change.com***
Lycos ***www.lycos.com***
MetaCrawler ***www.metacrawler.com***
Mirago ***www.mirago.co.uk***
Northern Light ***www.nlsearch.com***

SHOPPING
Online auctions

Auction Hunter ***www.auctionhunter.co.uk***
Auction Universe ***www.auctionuniverse.co.uk***
Bid4sport ***www.bid4sport.co.uk***
eBay ***www.ebay.co.uk***
eBid ***www.ebid.co.uk***
eSwap ***www.eswap.co.uk***
Eurobid ***www.eurobid.com***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
QXL ***www.qxl.com***
What Am I Bid? ***www.whatamibid.com***

Shopping directories

Best of British ***www.bestofbritish.com***
Centreshop ***www.centreshop.com***
CleverPants ***www.cleverpants.com***
Crocus ***www.crocus.co.uk***
eDirectory ***www.edirectory.co.uk***
Enterprise City ***www.enterprisecity.co.uk***



HEAL'S ONLINE
www.heals.co.uk
Classy Heal's has recently launched this site, where shoppers can pick up good-looking wares for their homes. If you're planning to tie the knot, why not sign up with their registry service?

The Gift Delivery Company ***www.giftdeliveryco.com***
Glasses-On-The-Web.Com ***www.glasses-on-the-web.com***
IMRG ***shops.imrg.org***
Inshop.co.uk ***www.inshop.co.uk***
Internet Shopping ***www.internetshopping.com***
Island Trading ***www.island-trading.com***
Shoes Direct ***www.shoesdirect.co.uk***
ShopGuide ***www.shopguide.co.uk***
Shoppers Universe ***shoppersuniverse.com***
Shopping UK ***www.internetics.co.uk/shop***
ShopSmart ***www.shopsmart.com***
Shops On The Net ***www.sotn.com***
Shop Spy ***www.shopspy.co.uk***
Splendour.com ***www.splendour.com***
TopUKWebsites ***www.topukwebsites.com***
UK Max ***www.ukmax.co.uk/shopping***
UK Shopping Zone ***ukshoppingzone.co.uk***
Virgin Net ***www.virgin.net/shopping***
Virtual Mall ***www.thevirtualmall.co.uk***
ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
Wedding List Services ***www.wedding.co.uk***

SPORT

FA Premiership clubs

Arsenal ***www.arsenal.co.uk***
Aston Villa ***www.astonvilla-fc.co.uk***
Bradford City ***www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk***
Charlton Athletic ***www.charlton-athletic.co.uk***
Chelsea ***www.chelseafc.co.uk***
Coventry City ***www.ccfc.co.uk***
Derby County ***www.dcfc.co.uk***
Everton ***www.evertonfc.com***
Ipswich Town ***www.itfc.co.uk***
Leeds United ***www.lufc.co.uk***
Leicester City ***www.lcfc.co.uk***
Liverpool ***www.liverpoolfc.net***
Manchester City ***www.mcfc.co.uk***
Manchester Utd ***www.manutd.com***
Middlesbrough ***www.mfc.co.uk***
Newcastle United ***www.nufc.co.uk***
Southampton ***www.saintsfc.co.uk/index.htm***
Sunderland ***www.sunderland-afc.com***
Tottenham Hotspur ***www.spurs.co.uk***
Watford ***www.watfordfc.com***
West Ham Utd ***www.whufc.co.uk***

Sport A-Z

Athletics ***www.nuff-respect.co.uk***
Cricket ***www.cricket4.com***
Cycling ***www.cycleweb.co.uk***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Golf ***www.golfweb.com***
Hockey ***www.fieldhockey.com***
Martial Arts ***www.martial-arts-network.com***
Motorsport ***www.autosport.com***
Motorbike Racing ***www.motograndprix.com***
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
Rugby League ***www.rleague.com***
Rugby Union ***www.scrum.com***
Snooker ***www.snookernet.com***
Tennis ***www.tennis.com***
Wrestling ***www.wwf.com***

STYLE & FASHION

Main sites

BeautyLink ***www.beautylink.com***
Cosmopolitan ***www.cosmomag.com***
Defining Edge ***www.definingedge.com***
Fashion And Beauty Internet Association ***www.fbia.com***
Fashionfile ***www.fashionfile.com***
Fashion Mall ***www.fashionmall.com***
FashionNet ***www.fashion.net***
Models.com ***www.models.com***
TheRumour ***www.therumour.com***
Salonweb ***www.salonweb.com***
Style Experts ***www.stylexperts.com***
Vogue ***www.vogue.com***

TELEVISION

Top shows

Big Breakfast ***bigbreakfast.channel4.com***
Brookside ***www.brookie.com***
EastEnders ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders***
Friends ***friends.warnerbros.com***
Neighbours ***www.neighbours.com***
Jerry Springer ***www.universalstudios.com/tv/jerryspringer***
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? ***www.phone-a-friend.com***

TV companies

BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk***
Channel Four ***www.channel4.co.uk***
Channel Five ***www.channel5.co.uk***
ITV ***www.itv.co.uk***
ONdigital ***www.ondigital.co.uk***
Sky ***www.sky.co.uk***

TRAVEL

Airlines

Air Canada ***www.aircanada.ca***
Air France ***www.airfrance.com***
American Airlines ***www.aa.com***
Britannia ***www.britanniaairways.com***
BA ***www.british-airways.com***
BM ***www.iflybritishmidland.com***
Buzz ***www.buzzaway.com***
Continental ***www.flycontinental.com***
Easy Jet ***www.easyjet.com***
Go ***www.go-fly.com***
Iberia ***www.iberia.com***
KLM ***www.klmuk.com***
Lufthansa ***www.lufthansa.com***
Qantas ***www.qantas.com.au***
Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***
United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Air ***www.virgin-atlantic.com***

Destination guides

Amsterdam ***www.channels.nl***
Australia ***australia-online.com***
Bargainholidays ***www.bargainholidays.com***
Caribbean Islands ***www.gopelican.com***
Cheaperholidays ***www.cheaperholidays.com***
France ***www.franceway.com***
Germany ***www.germany-tourism.de***
Greece ***www.areianet.gr/infoxenios***
India ***www.indiagov.org***
Italy ***www.travel.it***
Ireland ***www.12travel.co.uk***
Japan ***www.jnto.go.jp***
Kids Club Holidays ***www.kidsclubholidays.com***

TRAVEL-TRAVEL
www.travel-travel.co.uk
Christmas is over, New Year's is done and dusted; time to start thinking of your next holiday! Travel-Travel updates its database of bargain holidays every 20 minutes, so you're sure to find something to suit.

Pack Your Bags ***www.packyourbags.co.uk***
Portugal ***www.portugal-web.com***
Ski Club Of Great Britain ***www.skiclub.co.uk***
Spain ***www.red2000.com***
UK ***www.exploreukland.co.uk***
US ***www.go-unitedstates.com***

Ferries

Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.poef.com/poef/index.htm***
Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***

Rail travel

Euro Railways ***www.eurorailways.com***
Great Eastern Railway ***www.ger.co.uk***
Great Western Trains ***www.great-western-trains.co.uk***
Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport Information ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

Travel agents

Airtickets ***www.airtickets.co.uk***
Bargain Holidays ***www.bargainholidays.org***
Biztravel ***www.biztravel.com***
Usit Campus ***www.usitcampus.co.uk***
ebookers ***www.ebookers.com***
Expedia ***www.expedia.co.uk***
Holiday Deals ***www.holidaydeals.com***
Holiday Wizard ***www.holidaywizard.co.uk***
Internet Travel Services ***www.itsnet.co.uk***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
Leisure Planet ***www.leisureplanet.com***
STA Travel ***www.statravel.co.uk***
First Resort ***www.thefirstresort.com***
Thomas Cook ***www.thomascook.co.uk***
Thomson ***www.thomson-holidays.com***
Trailfinders ***www.trailfinder.com***
Travel Choice ***www.travelchoice.co.uk***

WEBCAMS

Directories

Allcam ***www.allcam.com***
Camcity ***www.camcity.com***
Digital Camera Network ***www.dcn.com***
Earthcam ***www.earthcam.com***
Webcam Central ***www.camcentral.com***
WebCam World ***www.webcamworld.com***
Webviews ***www.webviews.co.uk***

FAVOURITES

AfriCam ***www.africam.com***
Ultimate Taxi ***www.ultimatetaxi.com***
WalfordCam ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/walfordcam***

WEB CENSORS

Cybersnoop ***www.pearlsw.com***
Cyber Patrol ***www.cyberpatrol.com***
Net Nanny ***www.netnanny.com***
Xcheck ***www.xcheck.net***

WEB DIRECTORIES

About.com ***www.about.com***
4anything ***www.4anything.com***
AOL Netfind ***www.aol.com/netfind***
Excite ***www.excite.com***
Infoseek ***infoseek.go.com***
Liszt (mailing lists) ***www.liszt.com***
LookSmart ***www.looksmart.com***
Open Directory ***www.dmoz.org***
Thomson ***www.thomweb.co.uk***
WebCrawler ***www.webcrawler.com***
Yahoo! ***www.yahoo.com***
Yell ***www.yell.co.uk***

PhotoBox Bringing digital photography to life

Point

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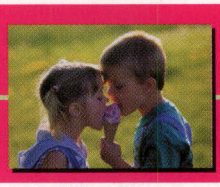
Click — PhotoBox

Up-load pictures to your free web photo album.

Share



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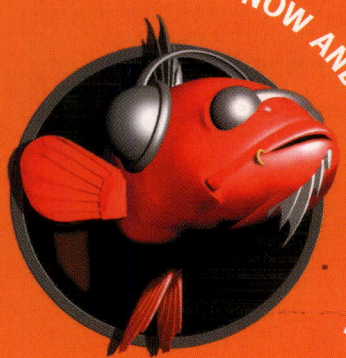

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so you are connected to the Internet permanently, for as long as you like. You won't have to dial up all the time either.

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Book your break away now, with help from Freeserve

You're in great company
How to set up and manage a business

16 pages that will change the way you use the Internet

Welcome

Welcome to Freeserve, the UK's No. 1 for the Internet. Whatever you want from the Internet, you can get it on Freeserve. Our content is second to none, covering all the topics that you could want to read about. Whether you like shopping, travel, chat or sport, you'll find all these and much, much more on Freeserve Today at *www.freeserve.com*. Freeserve is the Internet's leader for great content, but that's not all. Over 2 million people are currently online as members of the nation's most popular Internet Service Provider (ISP) and portal – they're all part of one big community who enjoy the many benefits of being a Freeserve member.

What you'll get from Freeserve

Free Internet calls

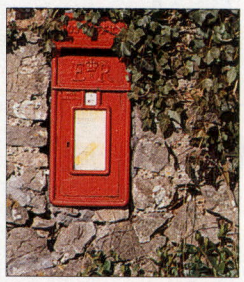
It's fair to say that everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some people use the Internet at work or at college, others spend hours on the Internet at home. Still more will log on for a couple of minutes a few times a day. At Freeserve we offer you a choice of Internet call packages, putting you in control of your access charges. It works like this: No Ties Freeserve Time lets you pay as you use, charging a local rate per minute you stay online. Or there's Freeserve HomeTime, which gives you unmetered access from 6pm until 8am during the week and all day at weekends. And Freeserve AnyTime allows you free Internet calls at all times for just £12.99. See *www.freeserve.com/time* for more information on all these packages.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, the new high-speed Broadband service for both homes and businesses. FreeservePlus for home works on a 'flat-fee' basis of just £39.99 per month plus a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details, see *www.freeserve.com/plus*.

Email

Imagine what it must be like to receive post at any time of the day or night, within seconds of when it was sent. Well, that's exactly how email works. And with Freeserve, you don't have to pay a penny. When you sign up, you'll get an unlimited number of free email addresses. Messages are free to send and receive; all you pay is the cost of the Internet connection call.

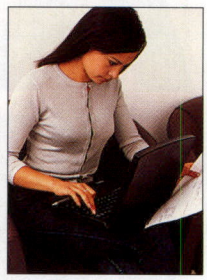
And now you have even more choice, thanks to FSmail, our Web-based email service. You can check it anywhere in the world – all you need is an Internet terminal! For more information, see *www.fsmail.net*.



Communication options

With email, there's always the danger that you might need to read your messages when you aren't near a computer. Now that needn't be a problem – if you have an Mobile Internet phone (also called a WAP phone) you can access some parts of the Internet through your phone. It means you can stay up-to-date with all the latest news and sports results even while your on the move. *www.freeserve.com/mobile*

Talking email



Finally, there's Speechmail. This clever option lets you access your email messages over the phone, without a computer. And as you would expect, there's no subscription charge for Freeserve members.

To access the service, simply sign up at the address below. You'll be given a phone number which you can use to access your mail. You can ring your number from any phone – including your mobile. So no matter how important the message, you won't need to sit in front of a computer screen. *www.freeserve.com/communications*

Web space

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are that you'll be keen to build your own site. Well, now it's easy thanks to some great benefits you'll receive as a Freeserve member.

We'll give you a massive 15 Megs of free space in which to create your own Web site. You can make your site about absolutely anything that you like – it can be dedicated

Freeserve: fun for all the family

CHANNEL GUIDE

Some of the great channels available on Freeserve

Today

Freeserve has always striven to provide the best content on the Web, and the Today channel has been styled with an exciting mix of topical content and features to enjoy. Go there today!
www.freeserve.com

Auctions

The thrill of bidding for items at bargain prices is no longer confined to auction rooms. By going to FSauctions at *www.fsauctions.co.uk*, you can peruse the wide variety of merchandise on offer and place your bid. It's up to you to decide how high to go!

to your favourite pop star, football team or even yourself!

And the wealth of free software on the Freeserve sign-up CD makes it easy to get your site up and running.

So with help from Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.

Great Content

At Freeserve we don't just strive to bring you free Web space, unlimited free email addresses and a choice of Internet access packages. We're also dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all under one roof: on the Freeserve Today page at *www.freeserve.com*.

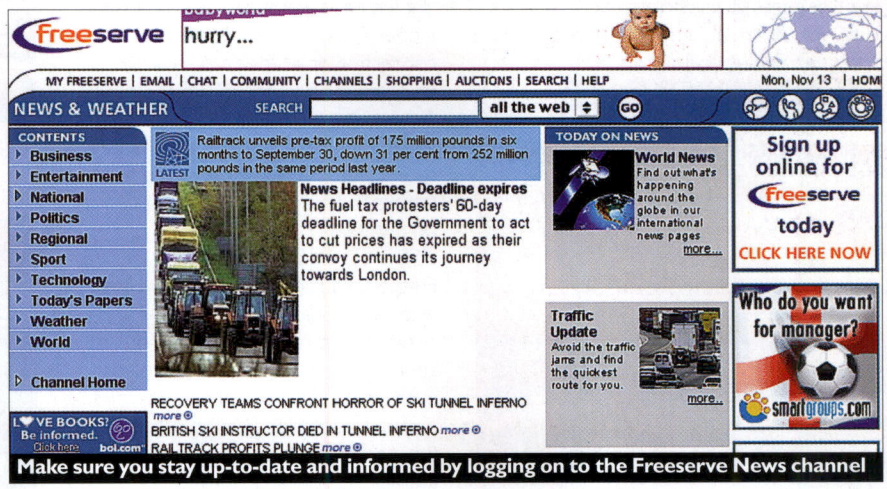
To make the most of Today, make it your homepage on the Web and check it every day. That way you'll get a fantastic digest of all the latest news, weather and sport just as it happens – and the opportunity to explore the events more thoroughly on the relevant channels, of which there are lots.

Freeserve for life

Freeserve isn't limited to hard news. Try the feature-packed Lifestyle channel, follow the stars with the Entertainment channel, plan a holiday with the Travel channel, or get talking on our Chat channel. If you have a small business, you shouldn't miss the Business channel. Or there are Sport, Learning and Money channels, as well as the women's channel at icircle.com.

Finally, our email newsletter will keep you up-to-date with all that's going on at Freeserve.

www.freeserve.com



Sign up online at www.freeserve.com or pick up the CD at Dixons, Currys, PC World or The Link. It's free.

Business

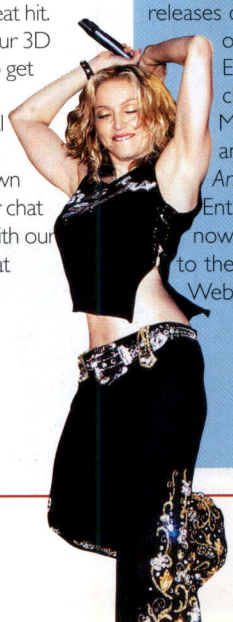
Whether you've got an established business or are a newcomer, Clearlybusiness.com, backed by both Freeserve and Barclays, can help. Get your business online in time for the New Year rush!

Careers

You're wired, now get hired – not fired. The Careers channel lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide; you can apply online, or submit your CV and wait for employers in your area to come to you!

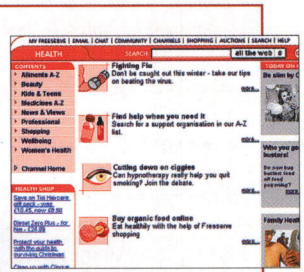
Chat

Our ever-popular chat service is a great hit. You can use our 3D chat rooms to get around and explore virtual reality worlds, set up your own chatgroups, or chat to the stars with our new celeb chat section.



Entertainment

The latest film and music releases can all be found on the Freeserve Entertainment channel. From Mozart to Moby and Antonioni to *Antz*, it's all in Entertainment. And now you can listen to the radio over the Web as well!



Health

The Freeserve Health channel will help you stay in good order. The channel is packed full of information and advice on everything from herbal medicine through to the latest medical breakthroughs.

Retna; LFI

powered by Freeserve www.freeserve.com

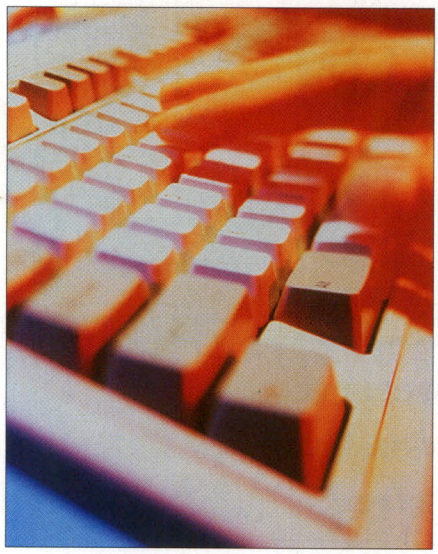
Get the Internet up to speed

Start 2001 as you mean to go on – speed up your connection to the Internet. It'll change the way you use the Web!

Make your Web access even faster

We've all sat in front of our computers, waiting patiently – or not so patiently – for a Web site to download. If you're frustrated by the speed that pages to take to appear on your screen, why not treat yourself to FreeservePlus Home user's Broadband service?

FreeservePlus is an ADSL Broadband service, which means that it is able to operate a lot faster than the standard modem that you are probably using at home already – at least 10 times as fast, in fact.



FreeservePlus Homes works on a 'flat-fee' basis, which basically means that it doesn't matter if you leave your connection on all the time – you won't be charged any more than that basic fee. As a result, you may well find that the way you use the Internet changes. In fact, a recent study has suggested that you could start spending up to three times as long on the Web!

There are many other advantages to FreeservePlus. A fast connection means video and audio from the Internet will be of better quality than with a dial-up connection. And if you use Narrowband, even basic software programmes can take a while to download. With Broadband the whole world of software becomes available to download online.

Freeserve is making the most of ADSL by offering those who choose to connect lots of unique content. This currently includes news from ITN; entertainment from Virgin records (including video promos and Web casts), peoplesound.com and Music Choice, Europe's premier digital audio service; and, coming soon, games and software from Gameplay.com.

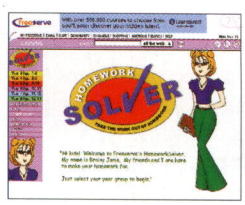
So what does it cost for all this? FreeservePlus, for home use with a single PC, costs just £39.99 per month, with a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details on FreeservePlus see *www.freeserve.com/plus*. Banish that frustration for ever!

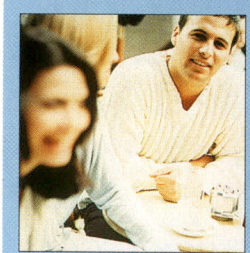
CHANNEL GUIDE

Some of the great channels available on Freeserve

Learning

From SATS right through to A-level, Freeserve Learning is there to help you through your studies with an interactive learning environment to encourage learning skills. And now it's possible to take an online course, thanks to BlueU.com.



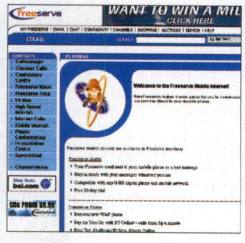


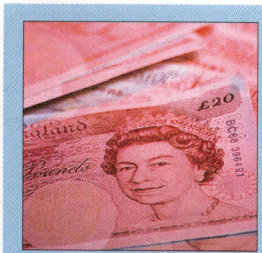
Lifestyle

The Lifestyle channel is an exclusive features magazine which brings you the latest lowdown on everything that matters, online and off. Whatever you're into, you'll enjoy Lifestyle.

Mobile

Make the most of your mobile phone with some great features on the Freeserve Mobile channel, including WAP, and the opportunity to personalise your phone with ringtones and icons.



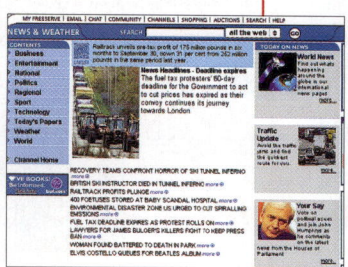


Money

Freeserve will help you keep your finances healthy with expert advice. Whether you want savings tips, a mortgage or advice on choosing an ISA, you can keep your pocket full with Freeserve.

News

Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb news service. You'll get all the latest stories, together with business news and a complete rundown of headlines as soon as they happen.



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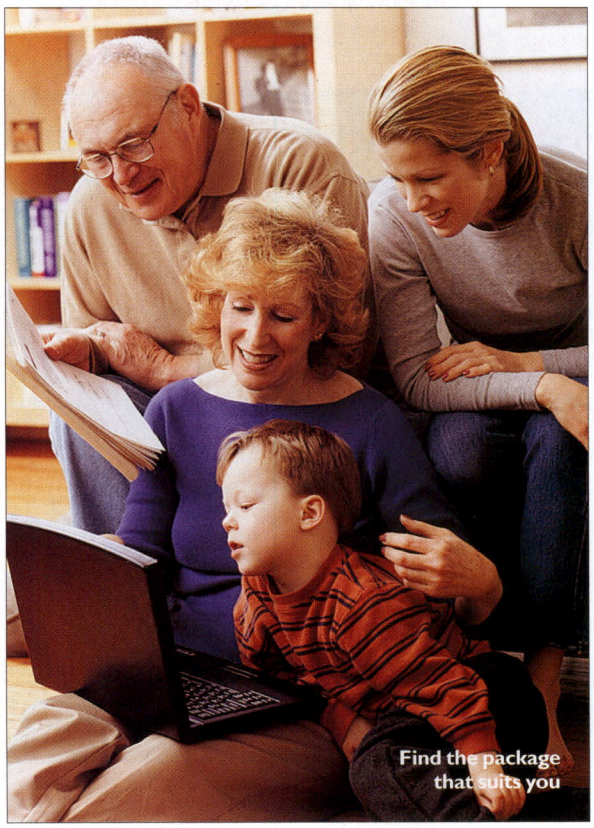
www.freeserve.com

Time in your hands

Make the Internet work for you, with three brand new access packages from Freeserve

It's vital that you use the Internet call package that suits your needs best – after all, you don't want to have to pay for your calls to access the Internet than necessary! Freeserve recognises this, and offers a great range of packages which mean you are completely in control of your access charges. And now there are a new range of options available to you, in the form of three great packages: Freeserve No Ties, Freeserve HomeTime and Freeserve AnyTime.

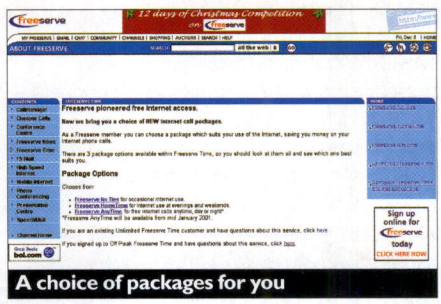

Find the package that suits you

First, there's Freeserve No Ties. Perhaps you use the Internet just to check your email every now and again, or to help the kids with their homework once in a while. If that's the case, then the Freeserve Pay-as-you-Go option, Freeserve No Ties, will suit you down to the ground. As the name suggests, there are no ties, no commitments, and no monthly fees. All you have to do is sign up as a Freeserve member at ***www.freeserve.com*** and you'll get your new dial-up number automatically. You can use the service straight away, and all you need pay is the cost of a local telephone call – you don't even need to change your existing telephone company. As a basic guide, if you use the Internet for less than 10 hours a month, then Freeserve No Ties is probably the package that will suit you best.

Next up is Freeserve HomeTime. If you or your family use the Internet in the evenings or at the weekends, then HomeTime allows you to enjoy the Internet during these periods without worrying about the cost of call charges. Freeserve HomeTime uses BT Surf Together or BT Talk & SurfTogether – when you sign up with BT and register with Freeserve, you'll simply pay a flat monthly charge on your normal BT bill. You'll get free Internet calls in the evening (from 6pm to 8am) and at the weekend (from 6pm on Friday to 8am on Monday). See ***www.freeserve.com/time*** for more information.

Or if you use the Internet a lot, then you'll appreciate the freedom that Freeserve AnyTime can offer you. This exciting new service allows you to make unlimited Internet calls at any time, day or night, for just £12.99. That means you can access the Web at any point, and you won't have to pay for any call charges at all – just the £12.99 flat rate. This new service will be available mid-January.

For more information on all the Freeserve call packages, simply go to ***www.freeserve.com/time.***


A choice of packages for you

Property

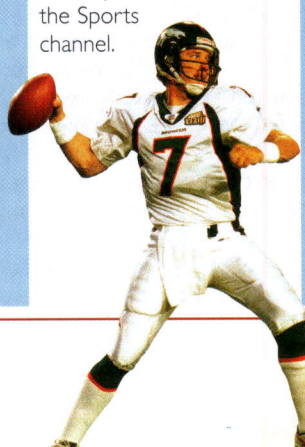
Everything you'll need to look after your home and garden is on the Freeserve Home and Garden channel, from maintenance, to advice on how to make moving house easier!

Shopping

The Freeserve Shopping channel can provide flowers or food, a car or a computer. Look out for great deals and savings from SHOP@freeserve and now the new Marketplace retailers. And remember, Freeserve can take the strain out of your Christmas shopping – check out our feature on page viii.

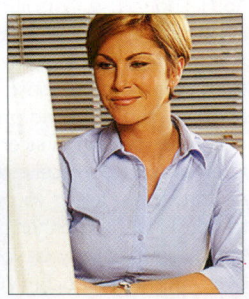
Sports

Whatever your sport, you'll find it on Freeserve. Football, tennis, cricket, rugby, motorsport, golf; you can get the results and follow your heroes on the Sports channel.



Travel

Click on the Freeserve Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide. There are always sensational last-minute deals on offer. Check out our best deals for Christmas and New Year getaways.



Women

Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, icircle.com, for the latest features, information and advice.

Empics; Retna

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A sackful of Savings

We all love a bargain – and what better time to get one than in that traditional month for sales, January? And thanks to Freeserve you can do it all online!

Freeserve Shopping

Christmas always leaves everyone a little short of cash, so the January sales are a welcome relief from the expense of the previous month – after all, it'd be criminal not to take advantage of all the bargains out there when there are so many things you still need.

But there's a down-side to all this – the crowds and hustle and bustle, as frantic shoppers desperately try to grab all the goodies before anyone else. Those fed up with returning physically traumatised and financially more impoverished than intended, should stay exactly where they are – in the comfort of their own home.

The Freeserve Shopping channel, at ***www.freeserve.com/shopping***, has always presented some great savings to its shoppers – you'll find a huge range of shops, selling everything from clothing to electrical goods, CDs to home and garden goodies – and Freeserve has all the sites with all the sales worth seeing this January. Check out all the great deals from SHOP@freeserve and all the retailers on the Freeserve marketplace. Not only will you find the wide range of goods that you'd expect, but also some great Internet-only savings which you're sure to find tempting. You won't see these great offers anywhere else on the High Street – they're exclusive to the Freeserve Shopping channel, and include such items as food and wine. Why not start stocking up now while the prices are so competitive?

It's easy to get carried away when the sales are on, so be sure to read the January sales

Save money – buy online

NEW ON FREESERVE

Check out some of our great new features

Use the Internet and stay in touch

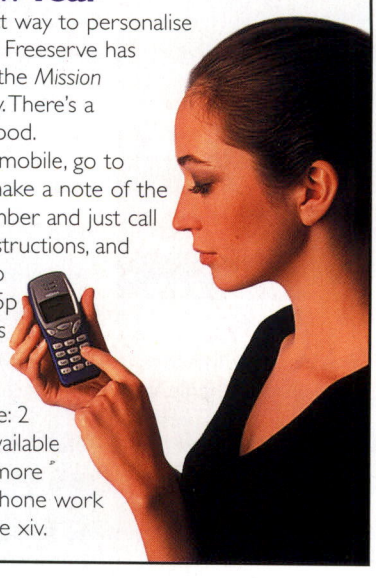
You'll know how frustrating it can be to hear you've missed an important phone call when you've been on the Internet. Well, it needn't be a problem any longer, thanks to a brilliant new device from Freeserve. It's subscription-free, and there isn't even any need to have a second phone line installed!

Freeserve Call Manager works like this: if you are on the Internet and you receive an incoming call, a small icon flashes up on the screen telling you so. A number of options are then open to you – you can either disconnect from the Internet and take the call immediately, or you can take it over your PC using Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP). Or if the call is for someone else (another person in the house, perhaps), you can have it transfered to another number – even a mobile. These diverted calls are the only calls you have to pay for – at a rate of ten pence per minute.

You might decide you don't want to take the call – in which case you can switch the caller to voicemail or leave them a pre-recorded message asking them to call back later.
For more details, see ***www.freeserve.com/callmanager***

Ringing in the New Year

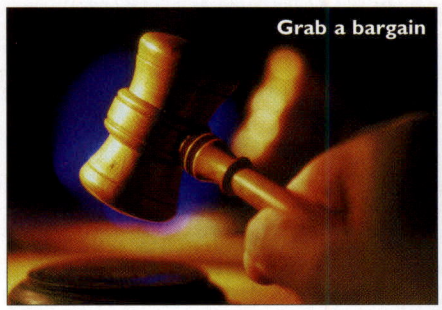
Ringtones and logos are a great way to personalise your Nokia mobile phone, and Freeserve has something for everyone, from the *Mission Impossible* theme to Slim Shady. There's a ringtone or logo to suit any mood.
To take control of your Nokia mobile, go to ***www.freeserve.com/ringtones***, make a note of the ringtone or logo reference number and just call 0906 957 9 957. Follow the instructions, and you'll receive your tone or logo by SMS. Calls are charged at 75p per minute from a landline; calls from a mobile will be charged at a higher rate, depending on your operator. Average call time: 2 minutes. Tones and logos are available on various Nokia models. For more advice on how to make your phone work for you, see our feature on page xiv.



Shop on Freeserve during the sales

FSauctions

If you like a bargain but don't want to face the crowds on Oxford Street for the January sales, why not take a look at FSauctions, the Freeserve Auctions channel? If you're new to online auctions, you'll find it's easy to join in the fun at ***www.fsauctions.co.uk*** – it's your chance to name the price you want to pay for the goods you want to buy! And best of all, it's easy, fun, safe and secure – with the FSauctions Promise featuring free buyers' insurance. Choose from thousands of offers every single day, from big-brand names to some unique, unusual and collectible items.


Grab a bargain

And there are even more bargains to be had this month, thanks to some falling prices on our AutoMarkdown auctions! On these auctions the starting price is the High Street price, which then falls over the course of the auction (which could last a few hours, or even days!). The starting price falls by steady increments over time, in front of your eyes. The gamble is whether to take the plunge and pay the price that is displayed at that moment, or to hang back and wait for the price to fall. However, you are not told how many items are for sale, so if you wait too long you could miss out entirely on the bargain of a lifetime!

With mountain bikes for all ages and ranges, outdoor clothing and equipment, DVD players, digital and widescreen televisions, digital camcorders and Mini-Disc players and Hi-Fis all up for grabs, you're bound to get yourself a bargain.

And if you are looking to sell those unwanted Christmas Gifts that are gathering dust in the cupboard be sure to visit FSauctions. It's very easy to sell an item on the site, and it doesn't cost anything to list your item for sale. What better way to start the New Year than with a profit – then you can really treat yourself in the sales!

You can use our Search facility to find the items that you really want. FSauctions have literally thousands of auctions, which increase week by week - offering variety value and choice. And by joining FSauctions, you can choose our email newsletters which bring details of our latest offers straight to your inbox. The newsletter also has details of our private auctions.

So as you can see, FSauctions can provide you with all the bargains you need this New Year! See ***www.fsauctions.co.uk*** for more details on how to make a saving.

shopping tips on the channel. These include such useful advice as 'make a list of items you really want or need, rather than getting distracted by all of the fabulous bargains you see around you.' That way you'll get the best from your shopping experience, without ending up with lots of goods you don't want – even if they are cheap! You'll also find a helpful feature on the channel that will tell you which are the top sale items of the moment, so you can get in there first to bag a bargain.

And now you can save even more money in the sales – start the New Year as you mean to go on, with a low interest credit card. The Marbles credit card offers a 4.5 percent APR for the first 6 months and protection against fraudulent use of your credit card over the Internet. For more details, see ***www.fscard.co.uk***.

So begin 2001 with a bargain – go to ***www.freeserve.com/shopping*** and see what savings can be had!

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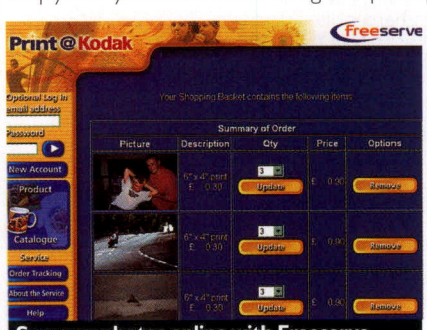
www.freeserve.com

Picture yourself online

Now that Christmas and New Year have passed, you'll be wanting to show off all those special photographs! And there's no better time to do it, thanks to a recent collaboration between Freeserve and photographic experts Kodak.

Kodak PhotoNet online allows you to put all your pictures on the Web for anyone to see – you don't even need a digital camera. Simply take your camera film along to a participating retailer. When you pick up your prints and negatives, you'll be given a secure Owner's Key so you can see your photos online. On the site you can manage your photos just as in a normal album.



See your photos online with Freeserve

For more details, see ***www.freeserve.com/photo***.

Money, money, money

There's no better month to get those finances in order than January – start the year as you mean to go on by finally organising that personal loan you've been putting off and getting a great deal on a credit card. And now you can do both in one place, thanks to Freeserve!

The Freeserve LoanFinder will help you find the pesonal loan you've been looking for, to help you access the money for anything, whether it's a new car, a caravan or a washing machine. There are over 400 to compare on the site at ***www.freeserve.com/money/loans*** – you can even get an instant quote, and, in many cases, apply online. And you need not repay more in installaments than you can afford, thanks to the Freeserve Budget Planner. There's even a handy guide which will provide you with valuable information on personal loans.

And if you'd like a better deal on your credit card, take a look at ***www.freeserve.com/money/credit*** – you can use the Freeserve CreditCardFinder to search for everything from the lowest APR available or longest interest-free period, to the highest cashback credit card. You'll also find useful information in the guide to credit cards.

So start 2001 with a healthy bank account, thanks to Freeserve!

Imagebank; Retna

Have a Happy...

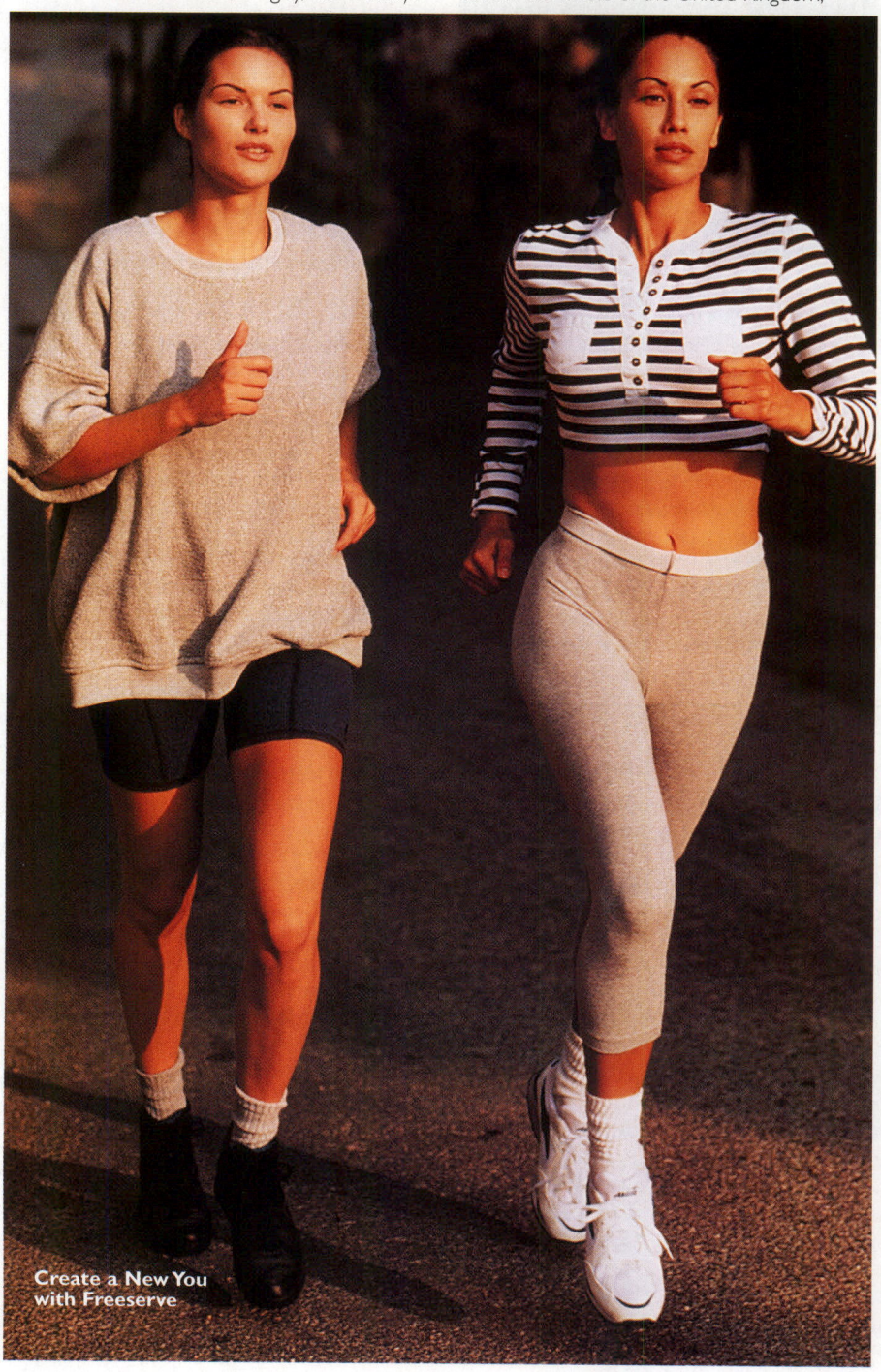
New Year with Freeserve – make the most of yourself and your life now that we're into 2001!

New House

What better time to look for a new property? If you're not happy where you are currently living, you'll appreciate the great new Freeserve Property channel at ***www.freeserve.com/property***, which will assist you every step of the way towards finding your own home.

The channel is a collaboration between Freeserve and Bradford & Bingley, the country's leading mortgage broker and High Street Independent Financial Advisor. So you know that the advice on the site comes from years of mortgage expertise!

Finding that perfect home is easy, thanks to the top companies whose search facilities are available on the channel. Bradford & Bingley's network of 370 estate agency branches covers the whole of the United Kingdom, while asserta home, fish4homes and 08004homes, all major partners in this channel, have also brought their extensive property databases to the site – allowing anyone in the UK to find the home that meets their exact requirements without leaving their PC.



Create a New You with Freeserve

But, of course, once you've found your ideal home there's still a lot more to organise until you can finally move in. The Freeserve Property channel will take the headache out of, for example, purchasing your mortgage – there's so much choice out there that selecting the best one can appear impossible. However, the Property channel, which works in association with CharcolOnline, provides you with everything you could possibly need to get the right mortgage. The Mortgages section includes a calculator, best buys, a Frequently Asked Questions section, and advice on how to find the best deals, as well as a choice of mortgages from over 45 different lenders.

There's lots of help on your actual move as well — the handy Move Planner helps you to track your budget and number of days to your move, provides a checklist of what you need to do (and when), as well as providing detail of useful services to make the move go smoother.

The site also offers quotes from some of the UK's best insurers, and if you're confused by anything on the site, the Guides and Advice section will explain everything you need to know, avoiding technical jargon.

So with the Freeserve Property channel you can make that dream of a new house come true!

www.freeserve.com/property

New You

New year's resolutions? That's the easy part. Planning a happier, healthier 'new you' always seems so easy on New Year's Eve – but come the cold light of January 1, those carefully-laid schemes often start to evaporate quicker than you can say 'good intentions'.

If this sounds familiar, don't fret. icircle.com has come up with some great ideas to help you see those resolutions through – all year round. Take your weight, for example. Planning to shed a few pounds? icircle Health has a handy gym search where you can locate the fitness centre nearest to you, plus a great new quiz to help you discover which diet will work for you. And if you want more options, *Sunday Times* columnist Amanda Ursell has reviewed the top five diet books for you to choose from, too.

Want to quit smoking? Well, you *can* do it –

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A new house for 2001

but no-one said it was going to be easy, which is where the in-depth focus of icircle Health comes in. Whether you need a natural remedy to stop the cravings or just expert advice on pepping up your motivation, you'll find that icircle.com is really on your side to offer help and support.

Perhaps it's a new look you're after – but it's January, and you're broke. Well, go to icircle Beauty and you'll find the best value beauty buys. Not sure if the new look's going to suit you? Try the online makeover tool where you experiment with styles on a photograph of yourself or on a model. It couldn't be more simple! And if you want a more radical 'new you', don't miss the reviews of salon face lifts.

How about matters closer to home? If you want to find out whether those kisses you snatched under the Christmas mistletoe are going to bear fruit, try the compatibility quiz on icircle Relationship. It's definitely a winner – and if it leaves you feeling you could do better in the love department, sign up with the site's online dating agencies for a fresh start.

But perhaps it's impossible to do too much planning – who knows if our future's not written in the stars, anyway? No matter how much of a cynic you are, check out icircle Horoscopes' annual astrological guide to planning your year and making those choices that'll keep you starry-eyed. It'll be a Happy New Year with icircle.com!

www.icircle.com

New Career

We spend nearly 70 percent of our waking week at work, and life is too short to turn up every day to a job you outgrew in the middle of last year. If you are determined to see through your New Year's resolution to change jobs, or up your salary, the Freeserve Careers channel will be with you every step of the way. We have teamed up with some of the top online UK recruitment Web sites to make your hunt for a dream job easy, quick and fun.

On Freeserve Careers, searching for a job is about as hassle-free as it gets. Simply register your CV online on our award-winning Jobsite, and watch the offers pour in. It's secure, and it only takes a few minutes.

You know you want to work for the best, and trawling the job pages can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. What you want is to preserve your energy for impressing a prospective boss. Well, we've got all the latest vacancies from top employers. Now all you need to decide is which one to work for.

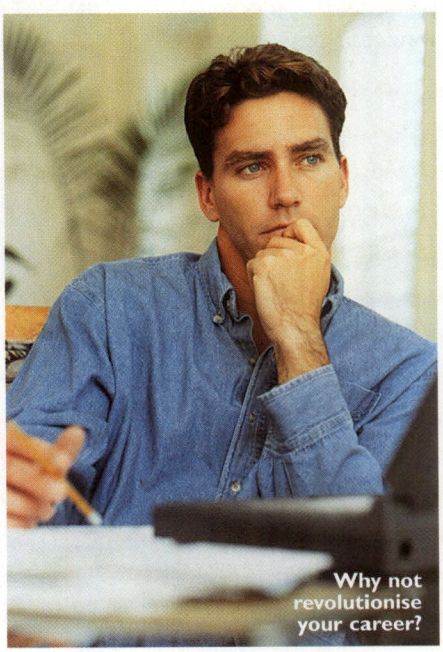
Job interviews are tough. Even the most confident go-getter can turn all of a quiver when it comes to facing an interview panel. If you've been out of the job-seeking world for a while, you'll need to equip yourself with some new skills. On Freeserve Careers you can learn how to assert yourself, how to give a good interview and how to present yourself in the best possible light.

So you've nabbed the job, now you'll need to figure out how you're going to tell your current boss that you're leaving. Take inspiration from some of the most famous resignations ever, like Boris Yeltsin, who chose the last day of the last century of the last millennium to announce his exit from public office.

There's no standing still at Freeserve Careers. Even if your working life does not leave you wanting, there may be other things you can change. Our lifestyle calculator helps you work out how much you need to be earning to keep that champagne habit flowing, while our quit clock tells you just how long you've got before that carriage clock is all yours.

So, from getting a new job, to improving your skills, or making the most of your working life, Freeserve Careers has it covered.

www.freeservecom/careers



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Build a better business in 2001

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

More and more businesses are being created all the time. So how can you make yours a success and make it stand out from the rest? Clearlybusiness.com has the answer!

Whether you are just starting out or are already running your own small business, no doubt you have set yourself some new year resolutions. Whether it's to get your own business off the ground, take your business online and start trading via the Internet, take better control of your finances and cashflow, spend more time at home rather than at work or simply increase sales, Clearlybusiness can help.

Packed with over 200 free guides and features, tools and services, Clearlybusiness aims to remove the hassle and reduce the cost of doing business. In addition, Clearlybusiness has introduced two great new tools to help you drive your business in 2001: the Clearlybusiness Community gives you access to over 500 online experts and like-minded business people; and a free 'Business Builder' interactive CD enables you to determine the right Internet strategy for your business, with money and time-saving tips and services.

An overview of the new services that will help you fulfill your New Year business ambitions is covered over these two pages, however more information can be found at *www.clearly business.com*.

Make your livelihood a success

Talk to the experts

Perhaps you are just starting up, or thinking of new ways to manage your finances, looking for help on finding the right Web solution, getting the right legal help or creating your business plan. Or maybe you want to talk to both like-minded business people and as experts in their field – if so, the Clearlybusiness Community is one of the most valuable resources you can benefit from.

The Clearlybusiness community enables business owners or managers to discuss and share practices and experiences to create a valuable network. This means that the business community is in the palm of your hand, and that over 500 experts and a network of like-minded business people are only a click away for advice and guidance.

Our online experts let you, as a Clearlybusiness member, post your business-related issue, openly or anonymously. You will then get a list of previously answered questions that are closely related to your original question. If the answers listed do not

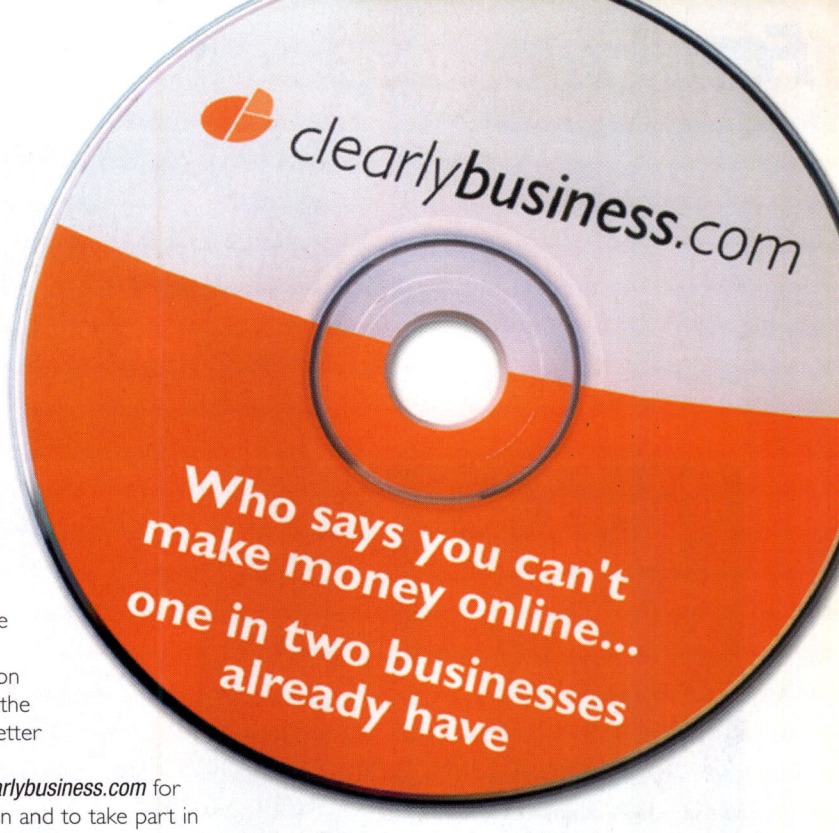
powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

sufficiently match your particular query, you can then post your question directly to our panel of business experts and get answers posted back to you directly.

There are also discussion forums, where opinions or questions can be posted to a live discussion thread on any relevant topic to which other users can respond and add their thoughts and comments. Among other things, this means that you can share your business ideas and experiences and tell others about useful services. It's a great place to start developing a business community of like-minded people, or just to learn from the collective wisdom of others. Forums continue as long as contributions remain relevant and useful, and after this the forums will be archived and stay easily accessible to users. So they'll always be there for referral.

You can also get your opinion across in other ways – Clearlybusiness is committed to making sure the people who create and influence policy hear the voice of small businesses. At Clearlybusiness there are a number of polls you can join in, on subjects ranging from budgets and regulation, to airing your concerns related to trading online. Your details will not be disclosed when taking part in a poll, however the results will be publicised both on the Web site, in the members newsletter and externally.

Visit *www.clearlybusiness.com* for more information and to take part in the Clearlybusiness Community.



Get onto the Web

Clearlybusiness has produced a free Interactive Business builder CD, which is packed with useful tools, information and interactive questionnaires to help you make decisions appropriate to building a better business and realise your New Year's resolution. The tools include:

Online strategy builder: Whether you own a shop, make machinery, run a hotel, are online already or just getting started, Clearlybusiness gives you interactive questionnaires that will help you choose the right Web solution for your business.

Time and Money saver: when you are running your own business, time and money are the two resources that you never seem to have enough of. With the interactive tools available on the CD, Clearlybusiness will help you identify how you can make better use of your time and make positive enhancements to your cashflow.

Video case studies: Clearlybusiness will show you how real companies and real people have adapted to meet the challenges offered by the Internet. You'll be able to see for yourself on the CD how they managed the process smoothly and chose the right solution for their needs.

There is also an interactive demo of the Clearlybusiness Web site that gives you the highlights of what's on offer, and an A to Z Internet Jargon buster to make sure you know your ASP from your URL.

To get your free Buisness Builder CD, email your address and contact details to us at businessbuilder@clearlybusiness.com.

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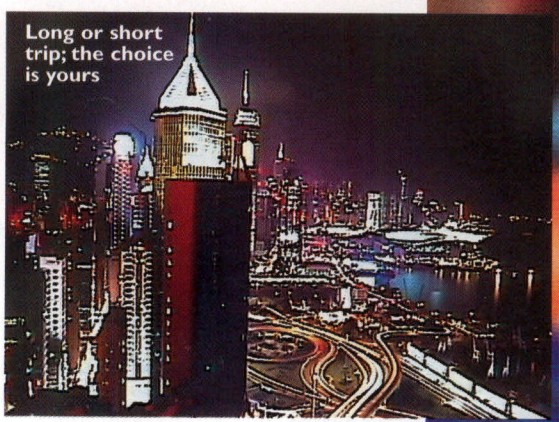

Long or short trip; the choice is yours

Time for the Holidays

Julie Collins, Freeserve Travel Editor, explains the fantastic deals that Freeserve has on offer. Book your summer holiday now to get a great bargain – you'll be off before you know it!

Now that Christmas is well and truly over, most of us are turning our thoughts to the summer, and our holidays. So you'll be pleased to know that there's no easier way to book that much-needed holiday than through the Freeserve Travel channel. We have some great package holidays at highly competitive prices, and booking online means you avoid the high street hassle of leafing through endless brochures for the holiday of your dreams. Through the Travel channel you can book a holiday in the comfort of your own home!

You can also get holiday insurance online, as well as the opportunity to buy foreign currency which will be available for collection at all the major airports in the UK. In other words, no queues, no fuss and fast service! Some of our best deals in 2000 included free return flights when you book accommodation through us, a saving of up to £1000 per person; and book a long-haul break, and get a short-haul break for free to one of 15 cities in Europe.

Freeserve Travel also prides itself on fantastic competition giveaways, such as November's incredibly successful free 14-day holiday to Goa, a package deal worth more than £2,000, which was won by Catherine and Alex Cooper from London. Our new and improved travel site brings you more content for those stuck for ideas on where to holiday, to the best car hire deals around. And for those staying in the UK, there's an up-to-the-minute traffic information site so you can avoid traffic queues across the country. Our click-throughs are kept to a minimum so your online experience is fast and efficient.

And we've recently launched forum boards, where travellers can share their opinions on everything to do with world travel – from discussions on favourite holiday hot-spots, to

Summer holiday fun with Freeserve

coping with airlines' in-flight no-smoking policy.

And if you are looking to travel soon, Freeserve Travel offers flights, accommodation and package holidays to winter-fun and winter-sun spots the world over – from Cuba in the Caribbean, to the Saalbach/Hinterglem ski resort in Austria. We're also keen to help you plan your summer 2001 holiday, from the Mediterranean to Morocco and beyond – our package holidays and hotel and flight deals are amongst the most comprehensive and competitive around. You will also see incredible deals to the States during the next three months, including San Francisco, New York and Chicago! Or if you are keen on shorter city breaks closer to home, we've got package holidays to the capitals of Europe at great bargain prices.

Remember that if you have any comments regarding anything you have read or booked on Freeserve Travel, you can email us at travel@freeserve.com.

So stay tuned for the best holiday deals on *www.freeserve.com/travel*.

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www.freeserve.com

Czech, mate!

Prague has been rated by Freeserve customers as one of the city-break hot-spots to visit year-round, and we will continue to offer short-haul breaks to this magical city at unbeatable prices throughout 2001. Here's a taste of Prague's wares...

Europe's Jewel City Sparkles Bright

When you visit Prague for the first time, you will be hard-pressed to find a good reason to go back home. Winding cobblestone streets, the ancient Old Town Square with its Apostle skeletal clock, the prose of Franz Kafka, and pint after blissful pint of locally brewed beer.

The heart of the city, Old Town Square, is your first must-see, with its pastel gingerbread baroque and neo-Renaissance facades. The Square clock is a big draw, too, and worth the crush of snap-happy Americans just to see Jesus and the 12 apostles revolve on the hour. Before you head out of the Square, buy a steaming cup of gluhwein (hot wine) from one of the local vendors – it'll keep you warm for the short walk to historic Charles Bridge.

The Bridge and Mala Strana tower are two of Prague's best spots, and if you stroll across the bridge in early evening just after the gas lamps have been lit, the atmosphere is moody and religious, with ghostly stone saints flanking you on either side.

Prague Castle and the gothic Cathedral of St. Vitus, set on the highest hill in the city, are romantic, impressive piles of stone, but the crush of weekend day-trippers from Europe is hard to miss – you have been warned! There are, however, hundreds of smaller churches to explore minus the crowds, including several around Old Town Square – the Old Catholic Church of St Lawrence and St James Church just behind Our Lady of Tyne Church in Old Town.

Prague is not the culinary capital of Eastern Europe, but you won't go hungry if you like meat! There are hundreds of traditional cafés dishing up simple fare – beef goulash and dumplings with stewed red cabbage, potato pancakes and pickled sauer-kraut, any sausage ever made, and black beer brewed locally costing only 60p a pint. My best café find, and a favourite haunt of Czech President Vaclav Havel, is Hostinec U Kocoura in the Mala Strana section of the city – sparsely decorated, friendly waiters and rib-sticking dumplings. From the café you practically stumble over Lichtenstein Palace, where for less than £5 you can listen to Prague's finest musicians churn out the works of Dvorak, Smetana and Mozart.

The best-guided tours are from Daily Walks of Prague, which meets hourly by the Apostle clock in Old Town Square. For around £4 per ticket the company offers nine tours, including a two-hour guided walk around Prague's old Jewish Quarter in Stare Mesto. The Old Cemetery, the synagogues, the Golem – all are told in great detail and with much relish from students at the local university. If you book a Prague break in winter bring your woolly sweater and gloves – it's cold – but don't forget there is always the steaming hot wine!

Prague: why not take a weekend break?

Retna

Making that important call

Mobile phones are now a part of everyday life. But are you really making the most of yours? If not, Freeserve offers some great features to help you do just that!

There are millions of us in the UK who own a mobile phone; men and women, both young and old, now use them as one of their main forms of communication. But are you just using your phone to make calls and nothing else, or are you *really* making the most of your phone? Chances are, probably not – after all, technology is coming on in leaps and bounds; new advances and features are becoming available all the time – many of which can be confusing. And that's where Freeserve can help, thanks to the new Mobile Internet zone at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*. Whether you have a WAP phone or not, chances are you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much more your phone can do for you.

Make your phone work for you

So what is the new Mobile Internet zone? In essence, it covers all the features that Freeserve can offer to allow you to make the most of your mobile phone when you're on the move. For instance, there's Speechmail. This handy service allows you to access your email messages over the phone, without needing a computer or WAP phone. You'll be given a phone number which you can use to access your email – you can ring it from any phone, including your mobile, and your emails will be read to you. Simple!

And you can customise your phone to make it reflect your personality, using the great ringtones and logos available on Freeserve – there's something for everyone, from *Happy Birthday* to the Happy Mondays, from Puppies in Love to Slim Shady. Getting them couldn't be simpler! To take control of your Nokia mobile go to ***www.freeserve.com/ringtones***, make a note of the ringtone name or logo and its reference number, and then call 0906 957 9 957. Follow the menu and you'll be prompted to enter the number of your chosen tone or logo, (for example, enter 101779 for the theme from *Mission Impossible*) and you'll receive it by SMS. Calls are charged at 75p per minute from a landline, calls from a mobile will be charged at a higher rate depending on your operator. Tones and logos are available on Nokia models 3210, 3310, 6210, 6130, 6150, 7110, 8110, 8810, 8850, and 9110. So go to ***www.freeserve.com/mobile*** to see exactly how to make the most of it!

If you have a Mobile Internet phone (also called a WAP phone) there's even more you can do. Imagine if you could access parts of the Freeserve site and lots of your other favourite Web sites even while you were away from your computer. Well, that's exactly what Mobile Internet will allow you to do – it lets you access the most useful parts of the Internet via your phone, at the touch of a button! You can receive all the essentials, such as news, sport results and weather in a basic text format.

If you have a WAP phone you can access Mobile Internet sites other than the one provided by your network – most phones are capable of loading and viewing sites beyond the network's homepage. But the Freeserve portal offers a range of different services collected together in one location. For example, instead of using a different site to read news, sport

and weather information, the easy availability of this information on Freeserve is designed to save you time. And in these early days of WAP, when connection speeds are limited to 9.6K per second, it's often quicker to browse one portal site than it is to surf between a clutch of external pages. There are lots of WAP services you can use on Freeserve: you can access your Freeserve email and view your inbox so that you can write, read and reply to email. All email messages are received to and sent from your normal Freeserve email account – there's no need to set up a separate account for WAP.

If you're out and about, you might well need to find a shop or service near to you in a hurry. Freeserve Mobile Internet can help here, too. If you're looking for a particular product, service or company, you can search for it by postcode, town, county or even nationally. Or if you're looking for something local to you, Freeserve can help find your local newsagent, petrol station, restaurant, hotel or pub.

Got five minutes to kill? Well, you can play games online on your mobile Internet enabled phone, too. Play *Tanks*, where you have to destroy the enemies' tank, or fight to the death in *Robot Arena*!

And if you're on the bus and see a poster for a great new film or music release, you can order the latest CDs, books and DVDs at competitive prices there and then! Simply dial in on your WAP phone and visit our shopping channel and pick yourself a treat.

Users of any network can access the services by simply entering ***http://wap.freeserve.com/*** into their mobile phone's Web browser. You may need to refer to your phone's instructions for directions on how to do this.

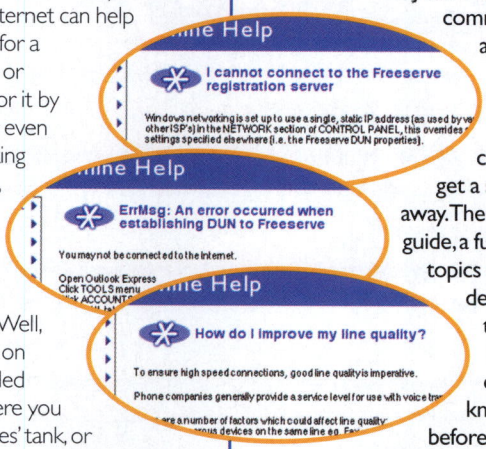
Each time you use the service you just pay the normal mobile Internet call rates to your mobile network provider for as long as you are connected – Freeserve do not charge for this service.

For more information on all these services, see *www.freeserve.com/mobile*.

powered by freeserve
www.freeserve.com

Online help

We've put together an awesome set of answers, for all the technical queries that you might have. It's available on our website – and it's free!

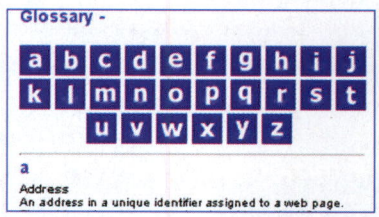


What are my options?

If you're new to the Net, Freeserve is committed to making it as easy as possible for you to get online. We've designed the help section on the Freeserve website so you can turn to Freeserve and get a straight answer, straight away. There's a complete content guide, a full alphabetical index of topics and a find function – all designed to take you straight to the answer you need. Separate sections deal with everything you need to know to avoid problems before set-up, and tell you what to expect as you begin to install the software from the CD-ROM onto your machine. It really is that simple!

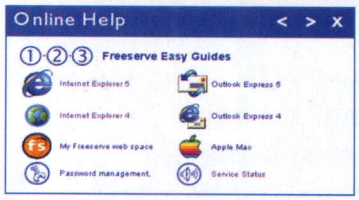
How does online help work?

It's easy! There are four main sources of information. Read through the descriptions below and you'll soon see which best suits the type of query you have. Then connect to Freeserve, visit the help section and get all your questions answered quickly.



The Glossary

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, turn to our glossary first. It's more than likely to be there.



The Easy Guides

If there's an area of your Net use that is causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a complete solution. You'll find answers sorted by subject.

Questions and Answers

If there's a specific question you need answered, turn to our Q&A section for rapid help. First select the general area from our drop-down menu, then a specific question. You may find your question has already been answered.

Contacts

If you still need help, you can email our support staff. They're the same people who staff our phone helpdesks, and they're trained to deal with your queries. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page. They'll be happy to help you!

How do I find answers on the CD?

Alternatively, there's also a fully comprehensive Help feature on the Freeserve start-up CD-ROM. When you put the CD in your machine you'll be given four options. The help button takes you to a comprehensive set of instructions to enable you to get online with Freeserve.
www.freeserve.com/search

Phoneline help

Our experts are on call 24 hours a day

Using Freeserve's online help couldn't be simpler, but from time to time you might have a direct question for one of our experts. To help you get the most out of your connection, Freeserve's Technical Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure you've consulted our online help before you call, as you may find we've already answered your question. If not, our trained staff can provide you with instant answers in plain English on a range of Internet subjects. Calls cost 50p per minute.

PC Support 0906 2517517 Mac 0906 7234000

MAIN PICTURE: RETNA

surf the Internet without watching the clock

Freeserve AnyTime just £12.99 per month

Freeserve leads the way in making the Internet an easier, freer place. And we're doing it again with Freeserve AnyTime.

From January, Freeserve AnyTime gives you Internet calls, anytime, day or night, for an incredible £12.99 per month. Freeserve AnyTime provides all the benefits of Freeserve's fun-packed, easy-to-use, free service without the worry of spiralling telephone bills. No one else can match it.

So if you're a regular Internet user, register for Freeserve AnyTime right now, at www.freeserve.com/time

be freeserve
www.freeserve.com

THE UK's No. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

Sign up online or pick up a free CD at any branch of

Dixons PC WORLD Currys The Link

See terms and conditions online. BT line customers only.

stepbystep

YOUR INTERNET ADVICE CENTRE

"NTL has brought fast Net access to everyone. Well, NTL subscribers anyway"

ISP news, p134

FEBRUARY 2001

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Using the right Net connection? We rate the country's top 50 service providers

Breathe: a penny a minute p134

Chat 139
How to get talking with the world

Newsgroups 140
Want some serious interaction? Try the world of newsgroups

Getting started

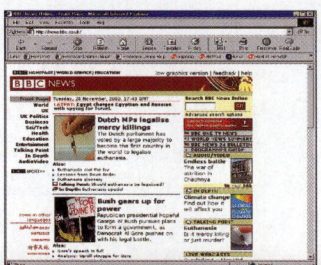
You want the Internet, and you want it now. But first, you need to know the tools of the trade...

Surf the Web

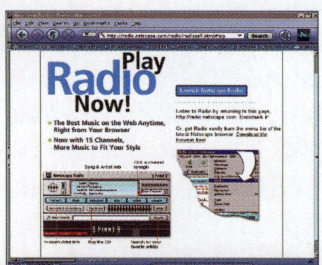
SIMPLE, THIS. YOU NEED A computer (commonly a PC running Microsoft Windows, but some people use strange things called Apple Macintoshes), a means of connecting to the Internet (a modem device usually built into the computer, plus an account to dial in to) and a means of seeing the web pages (that's a browser).

BROWSERS usually free of charge and pre-installed on most new PCs these days – if not, you can either download one from the Internet (use your employer's network; it'll be cheaper and quicker) or from a CD (you'll find them in magazines such as this one). Current champion is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***), but lagging not far behind comes Netscape's reliable, adaptable and recently much-improved Navigator (***home.netscape.com/uk/download***). However, there are many 'rebel' browsers either designed for a specific computing platform or boasting strength at a particular function (see the browser panel elsewhere on this spread).

NET CONNECTION most modern PCs come with a built-in modem, a device that will dial your Internet Service Provider (see p134) and therefore connect you to the Internet. Most modems these days run at 56K – OK, but hardly rapid fire. If you want to go quicker, you'll need to look at either 64K/128K ISDN, *eg* BT's Home Highway, or else 10Mbps ADSL (a permanent, zip-quick connection; for details see ***www.Btopenworld.com***). And remember that most ISPs charge for connection, either in the form of a fixed fee (say £9.99 a month) or on a pay-as-you-go basis (say 1p a minute). Consider at what times you surf most and exactly how much before choosing your tariff.



Explorer 5.5: plain grey in PC guise



New Netscape 6: colourful, funky

YOUR COMPUTER Virtually every modern PC is quick enough to handle the software required to surf the Internet. Your only choice really is platform: while most plump for PCs running Microsoft Windows, recent years have seen a resurgence in the fortunes of the Apple Mac (mostly thanks to the cutesy iMac). Needless to say, new Internet software is written for PC first, Mac some time after – and the huge and growing online gaming industry is virtually built around PC.

£-SAVING WEB TIPS AND TRICKS

Open more than one window on the web and plan your surfing. That way, while one page downloads you can be setting up the next (and the next) in a new browser window. And why stay online while you read a page? Explorer 5.5 and Netscape 6 let you save the entire page to your hard drive. Or else you can simply disconnect once the page is all there. Also, those pesky animated ads take time to download; go edit > preferences > web content in Explorer and switch 'em off.

Browser alternatives

Proof that there's more to browsing than Explorer or Netscape

PC BROWSERS

BROWSER	RATING	FOR	AGAINST	DOWNLOAD FROM
AMAYA	★★	Great for those into Net standards...	...not for those who aren't	*www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html*
ARACHNE	★★	It runs in DOS and is written by Czechs	A pain to set up	*arachne.cz*
CUSTOM BROWSER	★	Adds minimal extra customisation to IE	It's just IE with an ad in the top panel	*www.custombrowser.com*
HOTJAVA	★★	Pretty showcase for Java technology	Slow, though not as bad as on the Mac	*java.sun.com/products/hotjava/3.0*
INTERNET EXPLORER	★★★★★	For the moment, the king of all browsers	Hard to fault, unless you really try	*www.microsoft.com/windows/ie*
LYNX	★★★★	The original text-only browser	If it isn't text, Lynx isn't interested	*lynx.browser.org*
MOSAIC	★★★	Good for developers	Feels old. Is old. Not updated since 1996	*www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/mosaic-w*
NEOPLANET	★★★★	Funky interface replacement for Explorer	Internet Explorer in new clothes	*www.neoplanet.com*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★	Wide range of features for hardcore users	Doesn't display pages as prettily as IE	*www.netscape.co.uk*
OPERA	★★★★	Faster than IE or Netscape	Bit of a stickler for standards	*www.opera.com*
SURF MONKEY	★★★★★	Lots of fun – blowing up sites is great	'Unavailable - being upgraded'	*www.surfmonkey.com*

MAC BROWSERS

ICAB	★★★★	Fast. Gets rid of irritating ad banners	Could support more features	*www.icab.de*
INTERNET EXPLORER 5.0	★★★★★	State-of-the-art browsing on the Mac	Can be memory-hungry	*www.microsoft.com/Mac/ie*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★★	Runs IE close; looks can be themed	Current test versions not as stable as IE	*www.netscape.com*

Send and receive email

EMAIL: THE STUFF THAT HAS THE Royal Mail quivering in its boots (after all, who sends letters any more?). But before you can enjoy the visceral thrills of sending mail instantly through cyberspace (80 per cent of email apparently makes it to its recipient within five minutes), you'll need an address and a means of sending and receiving your post.

The former you can get either by signing up with an Internet Service Provider (or ISP, see page 130), getting one from your employer (many firms now have big networks and will afford you a name as part of the job), or through one of the web-based email service providers (Yahoo!, Hotmail, excite *etc*). But what are the pros and cons of each?

WEB-BASED EMAIL Dead handy if you travel a lot – once you have your password after signing up, you can check your mail from any Internet café or any place with a Net-linked PC. And some now offer the facility to forward and send mail through such desktop software as Microsoft Outlook or Eudora. The catch? Many have a rather clumsy interface, and sending and receiving mail can be slow – especially when America wakes up in the morning and logs on. If you fancy checking it out, start an account at ***www.yahoo.co.uk***, or head along to ***www.hotmail.com*** or ***www.excite.co.uk***.

YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER: When you sign up with an ISP, you'll be given at least one email address to use, and most will even provide the email software you need to get started (usually Outlook, although do remember that you're rarely stuck with it – you can choose between the leading packages outlined to the right here). The catch? You may find it difficult to read email from these accounts at your workplace – unless, of course, you can be bothered to manually forward mail for the next day.

YOUR EMPLOYER This usually means using the software the firm provides (invariably the networked version of Outlook), and you can't access your email from home using your own PC (unless, of course, your bosses love you enough to set you up there as well). The upside? It's probably all free of charge – and who doesn't like a free lunch?

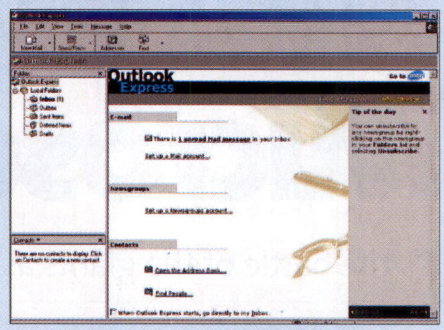
£-SAVING EMAIL TIPS AND TRICKS

If you're on a pay-as-you-go tariff, you spend the moment you log on. So don't. Write your mail in bulk offline, then log on and send it all at once. And watch those attachments – large images, sound files or documents will take time to go through the pipe. Try and keep mail below 750K in size, and use compression software ('zip' or 'stuff' files to make them smaller). Either way, most email clients set a limit of around 2MB – any larger than that, and it'll bounce straight back. If your family is beginning to fight over the PC because you've all got email addresses, create folders in Outlook, Netscape Mail or Eudora into which the mail can be directed automatically. Finally, your inbox is now packed to capacity. First, have regular clear-outs; 80% of it is junk. Second, save any attachments onto your hard drive and then delete the mail. And lastly, copy all important mail onto your hard drive and delete the original.

Email clients

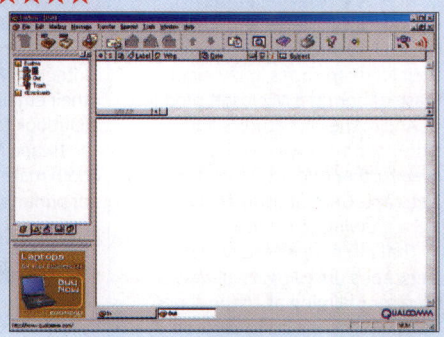
Sure the right people are handling your post?

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK EXPRESS 5 ★★★★



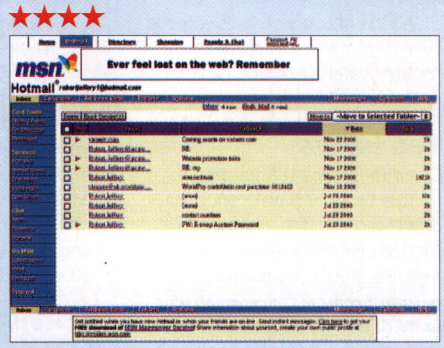
If your PC came with IE5+, you're most likely already using Express 5. And that's a good thing: the latest Outlook is easy to use and set-up, and now features such useful extras as Hotmail support (you can download your Hotmail messages for working offline, or synch your HotMail and Express address books). And with so many families now having individual email addresses, Outlook makes setting up individual accounts fuss free. Available for both PC and Mac, the download is at ***www.microsoft.com/windows/oe***

EUDORA 5.0 ★★★★★



Launched back in September, the latest Eudora is available in Paid ($49.95), Sponsored and Light modes. Both of the latter can be grabbed free from ***www.eudora.com***, but while Light is stripped down, Sponsored features ads (see picture, right). Either way, the Eudora package is excellent – the interface is attractive and intuitive, while the package integrates well with the address book. 5.0 even includes a novel 'MoodWatcher' – a natty little feature than scans your incoming and outgoing mail for 'inflamatory' language, and affords the mail a one, two or three 'red chilli pepper' rating!

MSN HOTMAIL ★★★★



The web-based email service that got the whole ball rolling. You sign up for a free account, and in return you get an email address and a password. There's a limit of 2MB set on your inbox, and an Inbox Protector to fight off any spam mail. And, of course, MSN is ensuring that the service moves with technology; the Hotmail Alert service will notify your pager or cellphone of important incoming messages. Sign up at ***www.hotmail.com***, or else try ***www.yahoo.co.uk*** or ***www.excite.co.uk***; the services are all similar.

NETSCAPE MAIL ★★★★

Now bundled in with the new Netscape 6 browser, Mail runs Outlook Express neck-and-neck; as with the Microsoft product, there's full integration with its built in address book. True to the philosophy of the 6 browser, the themed Mail interface tries to pack in as much 'user friendliness' as possible. The 'My Sidebar' feature, for example, is carried over from the browser – so you can keep your instant messaging buddy list in sight, and even the latest news.

ON TEST

Netscape 6 vs Microsoft Explorer 5.5

It's the battle of the giants as Netscape launches its most audacious browser yet

IT SEEMS ONLY YESTERDAY THAT Microsoft was bathing in the warm glow of unreserved praise. The latest incarnation of its famous Explorer browser, 5.5, was king of the hill. Good-looking, stable and smart, it even had Internet pros trashing their Netscape 4.75s in favour of (gasp of horror) a Microsoft product.

And in the UK's studies and sitting rooms, it was broadening even further Microsoft's lead over Netscape. Current estimates give MS a growing 70/30 lead.

That all changed today, with Netscape's unveiling its all-new 6 browser. Claiming all of the clever functionality and good looks of Explorer 5.5, the newcomer then goes one stage further by gathering within a single frame all of the major communications you'll use in the average surfing day.

Which, of course, leaves you, the everyday Internet user, with a mouth-watering choice: Explorer 5.5, or Netscape 6?

The basics

Given their depth of features, neither browser is an economical download through a home 56.6K modem; you're better off either ordering the CD from ***www.microsoft.com/uk*** or ***www.netscape.co.uk***, or else grabbing the download through your employer's network (with their permission, of course...).

Both installation wizards are easy enough to follow, and once onto your computer the browsers are stable and quick, with few actual differences in how they present Web pages – which is a huge compliment to Netscape given Explorer 5's excellence at the task.

They even share fundamental layouts: a customisable toolbar and address bar occupy the top of the frame, with an indicator showing page progress and security status at the bottom.

But then you would expect no different. Microsoft and Netscape between them account for 90% of the global browser market, a status they achieved by having a rough idea of what works for most people. So choose either and you'll find it easy to set your own home page, see and delete any cookies you've collected, and choose and organise bookmarked sites. In addition, both integrate well with their email clients (Outlook Express and Netscape Mail), and both make the business of printing a doddle.

If you're a sucker for good looks, Netscape 6 will have you drooling

Make it your own

If you're a sucker for good looks, Netscape 6 will have you drooling. While Explorer 5.5 in PC guise looks little different from its recent forebears, ie grey, Netscape has perhaps learnt a few lessons from the handsome Apple Mac Explorer release and decided to take the whole thing one stage further.

Fresh from the box, 6 comes with a choice of two 'themes' for its frame: Modern and Classic. The latter affords the browser the plain interface of 4.75. But switch to Modern and you're greeted by an altogether more 21st century affair, complete with sculpted buttons and shaded sidebars. And if you get bored, you can always visit ***home.netscape.com/themes***, where you'll find a small but growing collection of alternatives for download.

Hardcore Internet users may view such stuff as shallow frippery, but we suspect that it'll go down a storm with the hordes of home PC users tired of the dull interfaces of Microsoft Windows/Explorer.

You can then spend many a happy hour in Edit > Preferences deciding just how you'd like either browser to display its pages. You can select which fonts you would like the page to use (and if you want your choice to override that of the page's creator), their size, and the colours of not only the links but also the page background.

If you're paying the bills and would like your Web fast and without fuss, both allow you to switch off pictures and animated GIFs (also handy if you're bored witless by moving banner ads).

From there, you're into the rather more heavyweight world of privacy. The new 'cookie manager' in Netscape does what it says; you can quickly see which small files have been sent by sites wishing to spy on your surfing habits. Even better, you then get the option of which ones to keep (remember that many store useful stuff like passwords).

Explorer 5.5 also offers cookie management, although not with the same sophistication of new Netscape. There is, however, a software patch called 'Explorer 5.5 Privacy Enhancements' still in beta stage, available from ***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***.

Bookmarks

You know what you want from the Web, and you want your browser to help you get over the hurdles. Both competing browsers manage the basics with ease. Bookmarking a site is the matter of a single click or keystroke, and in History you can scan back over sites you saw but didn't store (you can even tell the browser for how long to hold the history file).

Both will let you create folders in which you can store your top sites in the personal toolbar folder: just click on a folder and you'll be greeted by a drop-down menu of chosen URLs. It's quick, easy and smart, and a shortcut that any heavy Web user will find indispensable.

If you're tight with the pennies, don't forget that either browser will let you save a page in its entirety to your hard drive for review offline.

Searching

The differences begin to emerge once you begin hunting for a site or service. Both browsers feature a 'smart search', allowing you to input a single word, eg a company name into the address bar. After that, they go their separate ways: Explorer will find the .com version of that address (IBM, for example, results in ***www.ibm.com***), a process that relies for its accuracy upon companies owning their URLs (let's try ***www.whitehouse.com***, shall we everyone?).

Attempt the same shortcut with Netscape 6, however, and you'll be told '1101 – Host not found'. Instead, like 4.75 before it, the new browser

LOOK AT WHAT YOU'RE MISSING

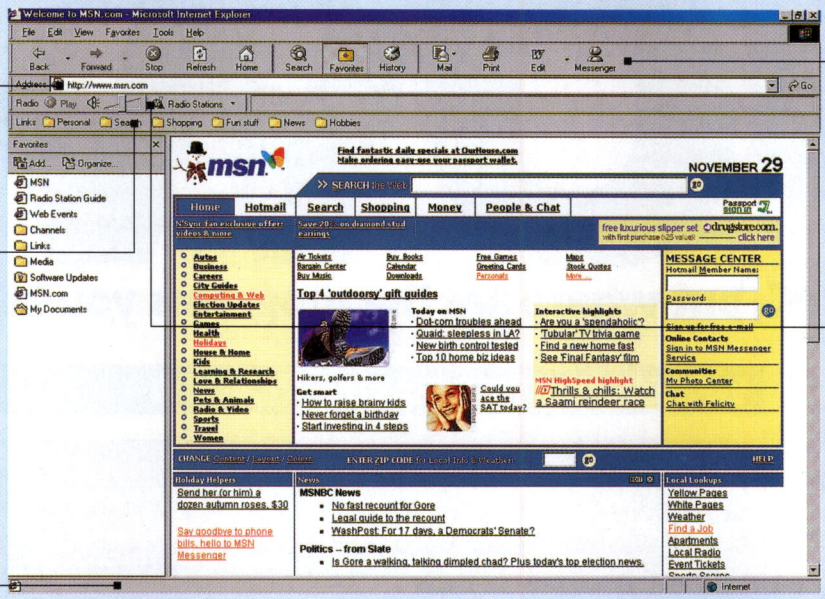
PC owners, eat your hearts out. When Microsoft unveiled the Mac version of Explorer 5, it produced what remains the finest browser on Earth. How? Believe it or not, the company behind Windows included features in its Mac Explorer that the PC version does without – not least the Internet Scrapbook.

A brilliant feature, incorporated into the browser's permanent sidebar, it does what it says: hit 'Add' and it takes a snapshot of the page you've downloaded. So if you have five or six pages you want to read, visit each and add to the scrapbook. Then disconnect and surf without the expenditure. ***www.mactopia.com***

How do the browsers compare?

Your at-a-glance guide to choosing the browser that suits you

Microsoft Explorer 5.5



Netscape 6

demands knowledge of a keyword system; input a function in mind (shop, search, personals) into the address bar followed or preceded by the personal bit – your city, the product you're after, etc. For a better idea of how it works, visit ***home.netscape.com/escapes/keywords***. Admittedly, we found the resulting links from Netscape's search engine to be fairly accurate and useful, although you have no choice of search engine. Which, funnily enough, is also the case if you choose any one of the four new options set along the bottom of the frame: hit any of the options with Business, Tech, Fun or Interact and you'll be driven into Netscape again.

Luckily, the search facility within 6's 'My Sidebar' can be set to use pretty much any search engine (or combination of engines) you choose, going one better than Microsoft, where the sidebar's engine is a choice of MSN or, well, MSN.

Advanced features

For tangible proof of browsers' advances over the past five years, spend a few moments examining Netscape's new 'My Sidebar' feature. Preloaded from new with five basic tabs, you have the option of adding from over 600 sites available from ***search.netscape.com/mysidebar***.

Neat technology, then. But will you use it? During our week of tests, we only really employed the 'search' tab. Heavy AOL Instant Messenger users might keep an eye on their Buddy List. But in reality, that was about it.

Of course, Explorer has its own line in neat integrated facilities, not least of which is 5.5's link with RealNetworks radio (the controls can be included in the top toolbar).

VERDICT

It's a huge credit to Netscape that the winner here is more a matter of personal preference than objective criteria. Explorer now has a rival in speed and stablility, and is arguably more pleasing on the eye. For heavy AOL Instant Messenger users or fans of Netscape's massively improved Web presence, 6 will win the day. For our tastes, Netscape's newcomer is a little too keen to keep you within its parent company's world, while Explorer allows you to build more of a personal Web experience. Explorer it is, then... but only just.

The freeloader's guide to Down

You've got a PC, but where are the programs you take for granted

If you're buying a new PC, chances are it will come loaded with software in an effort to sweeten the deal. But if you buy a used PC, the software it comes with is usually the last thing on your mind – and it may be a surprise to find the hard drive empty. This is particularly true when companies sell off their old PCs, as they would be breaking their licensing agreements – and the law – if they left the software on them.

However, help is at hand on the Internet. The Web has free (or almost free) programs available for download that are just as good as the professional packages. And by following our guide you can save yourself a cool £1,800.

WEB EDITORS

Web editors are a must of modern society. Gone are the days when anyone who wanted to build a site had to learn HTML and type the codes into a word processor. It wasn't long before companies realised that if the Net was to appeal to the masses they would have to make Web editing programs that did all the coding behind the scenes.

WEB EASY

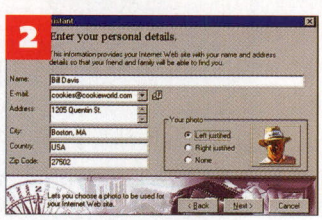
WHAT IT IS Web Easy Version 1.0
WHO MAKES IT IXLA
SPECS 7.63MB, Windows 95, 98 NT
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Trial version, $49.99 for Web Easy Millennium
URL FOR DOWNLOAD ***www.zdnet.com/downloads***
URL FOR HELP/TIPS ***www.ixla.com***
Has more templates and a tutorial to add to the trial version.

This program is easy to use and takes away the hassle of learning HTML. You can also upload your files straight onto the Net without using a separate FTP program.

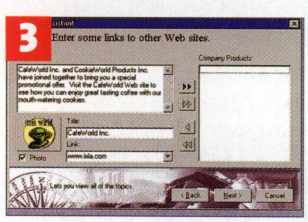
WORDS: PAUL GRANT

WEB EASY GETTING STARTED

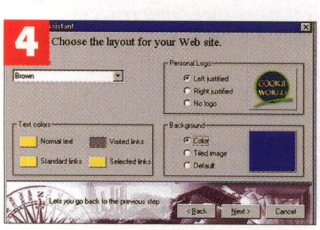
1 Clicking on New in the left-hand menu brings up the Web Site Assistant, a step-by-step guide to building your own Web page. The first choice to make is whether you want to use a business or personal template, or start with a completely blank page and create your own format. Then, choose where the files will be saved, using the dialog box to browse your hard drive if you don't want them saved in the program folder.



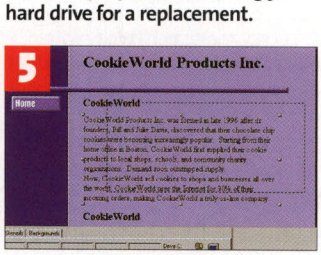
2 If you chose a template, you'll be prompted to add your details. You can also add a picture by clicking on the example pic and browsing your hard drive for a replacement.



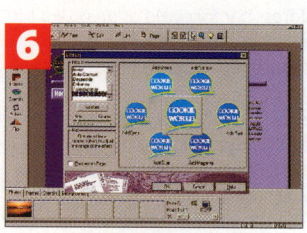
3 If using a template, you will then be prompted for more company or personal information to include, including links to other sites.



4 You can customise the template by changing the colours of the background and text, as well as pictures.



5 Once the template's completed, you can then move any of the elements around as you please.



6 You can also add new pictures or text, and change the text size and font or change the pictures' colour.

loads!

at work? Get the lowdown on downloads and save thousands!

COFFEE CUP

WHAT IT IS CoffeeCup HTML Editor Version 8.7
WHO MAKES IT CoffeeCup Software
SPECS Windows 95, 98
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Shareware, $49 to register
URL FOR DOWNLOAD ***www.coffeecup.com/download/shareware.cgi?01***

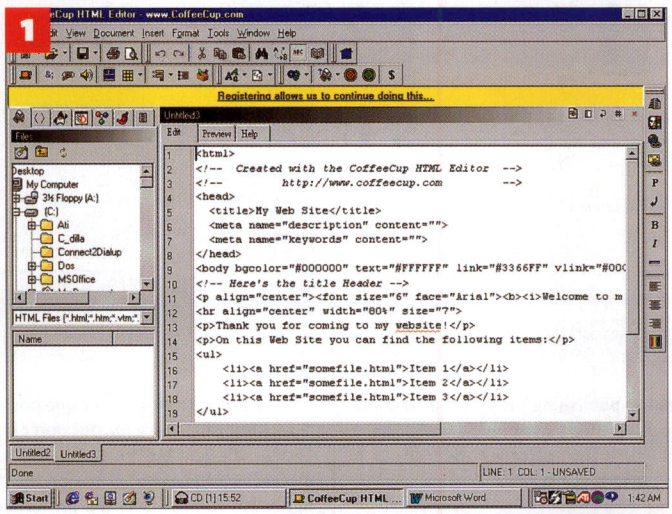
The other side of the coin from the graphic Web editor, this program is all about getting to grips with HTML. A number of shortcut buttons let you do useful things such as add links and pictures, so you don't have to go to all the hassle of hand-coding everything, and an excellent split-screen approach allows you to flip between the code and a preview of what the page will actually look like. Some nice touches include opening a new file and being given the choice of basing it on a template, an existing page or a list of recent documents. You also have access to a menu tree showing all of the files on the hard drive, so you don't have to exit the program to find what you're looking for.

...and if you'd paid the money

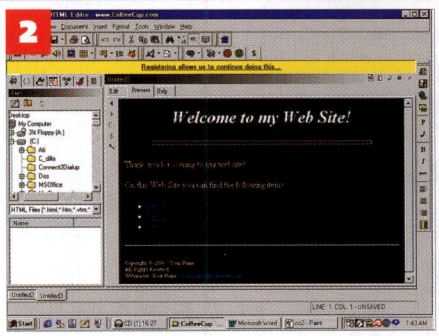
MACROMEDIA DREAMWEAVER 3
Apple Mac and Windows
£229 ***www.softwaresavings.co.uk***
Popular Web editor that has a good interface and is easy to use. Package includes Fireworks, for making your pictures easier and faster to download.

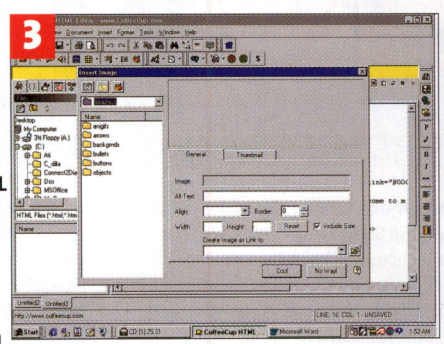
ADOBE GOLIVE
Apple Mac and Windows
£234.99
www.microwarehouse.co.uk
Hi-end Web site creation that includes Javascript functions and allows you to create animations.

COFFEE CUP ADDING PICTURES

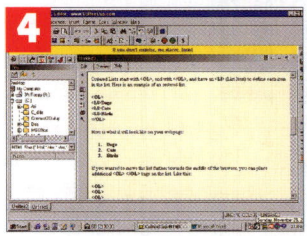


1-2 There are several templates to get you started, so choose one by selecting New From Template from the File menu. This brings up the raw code in the right-hand window (pic 1) and pressing the Preview button will show how the page looks (pic 2).

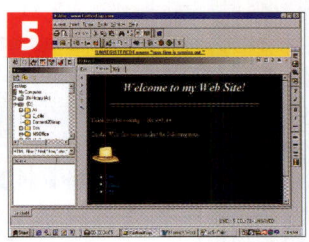




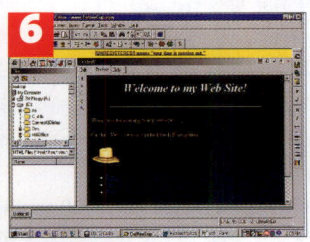
3 We've chosen a basic starter page with a list of what's on the site but no pictures. To add a picture, press the Edit button to go back into the raw text. Put the cursor in the HTML code where you want the picture to appear on the page. If you don't know which HTML code corresponds to which piece of the page, you can look up the code for a specific part in the Help section. We're going to put the picture before the list of three items, so we can find the code for the list by looking at List Designer in the Help section.



4 By looking in the Help section, we know the list starts with the <li> command. Place the cursor before the first <li> tag. Then press on the Insert Image button, which is the second one from the top on the menu of icons running down the right side of the screen.



5 Use the menu to search the hard drive for the picture you want. You can also add a link into the pic. Press Cool when you're happy.



6 Switching back to Preview mode shows that the picture is now in the page. To continue writing code, click the Edit button.

DESKTOP PUBLISHING

Most people don't have any need for desktop publishing software, especially since modern word processors can now handle pictures and more elaborate text formatting. But there are times when a bit of DTP can go a long way, and it can help to spruce up anything from posters and invites, to the office newsletter.

The main advantage of desktop publishing over word processors is the ability to move objects around the page quickly and easily. Elements such as headlines, pictures and general text are all placed inside their own boxes and can be formatted individually. Items that need to stay together can be linked so when one is moved, so is the corresponding element. By using style sheets it is also possible to format text very quickly and keep a page's style consistent.

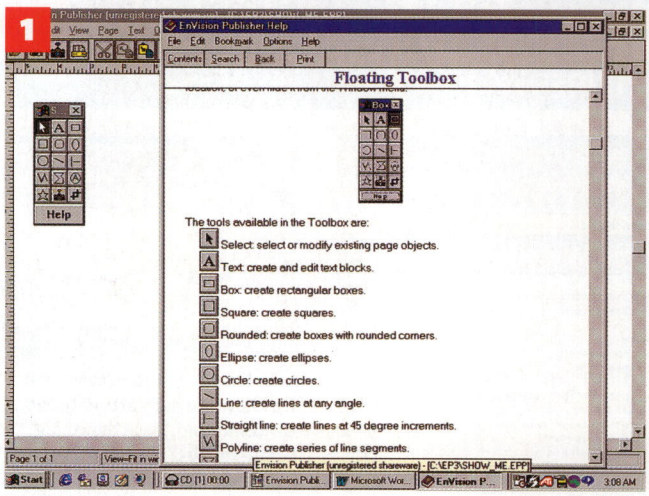
ENVISION PUBLISHER

WHAT IT IS Envision Publisher 3.0
WHO MAKES IT Software Vision
SPECS 3.80MB, Windows 3.1, 3.11, 95, 98, 2000 or NT
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Shareware, $49 for Envision Publisher Plus
URL FOR DOWNLOAD ***www.envision-publisher.com/envision/envision.htm***

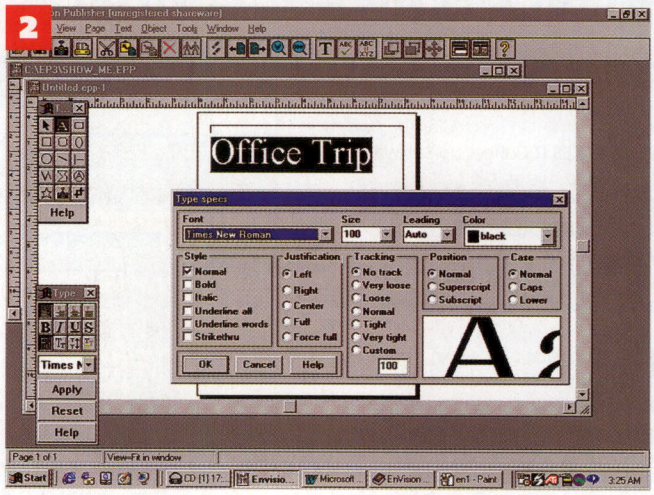
Envision Publisher is a desktop publishing program with the kind of features you would usually find in higher-end packages . As well as the obvious design capabilities of page-layout, it boasts a set of drawing tools, spell checker and thesaurus. Users can also create their own style sheets, to allow text to be formatted quickly and easily.

One drawback with Envision is that it is still only a 16-bit application and because of this it doesn't support longer filenames. You'll also need to shell out the $49 for the registration fee if you want to get your hands on the larger selection of templates available, but it's easy enough to make your own.

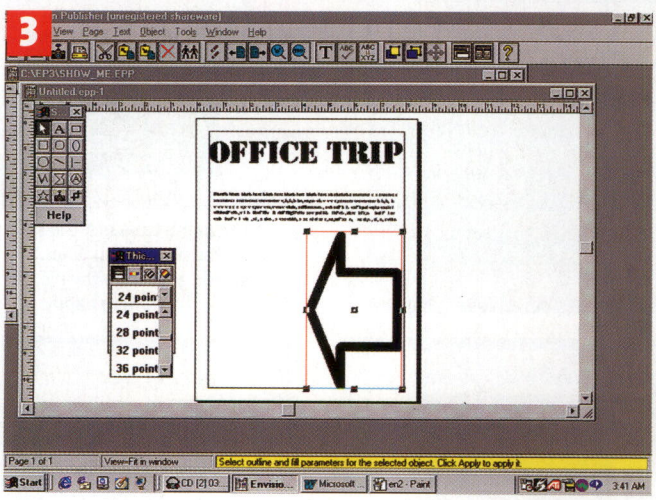
ENVISION PUBLISHER MAKING A SIMPLE POSTER



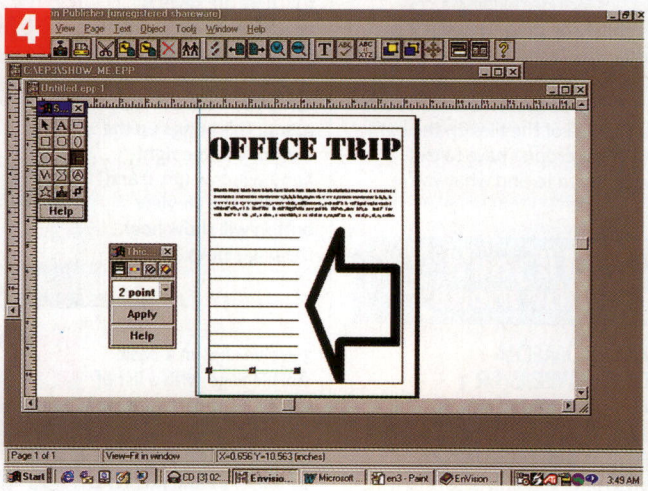
1 The way to get to grips with most desktop publishing programs is to learn all the symbols on the tool bar. If memorising the 15 symbols on Envision's tool bar is putting you off already, don't worry. The bottom of the tool bar is a help button and displays all the other buttons' functions.



2 We're going to create a simple poster, a sign-up sheet for a trip. Choose New from the File menu, but don't base it on a template, so the page is clear. Click on the Text button on the tool bar and use the cursor and the left mouse button to place a box on the page. Type in the text then select it and right click. You can now change its size and font by selecting Type Specs.



3 Repeat the procedure with another box of text talking about the details of the trip, in much smaller type. Click on the Shape icon on the tool bar (bottom left). Create a box on the page by holding down the cursor and a dialog box will appear. Use the drop-down menu to look at the different shapes. For our purposes we're going to choose an arrow. When you click OK the Line and Fill palette will appear, and you can use this to change the thickness of the line (the point size) or fill in the shape completely, in a range of colours.



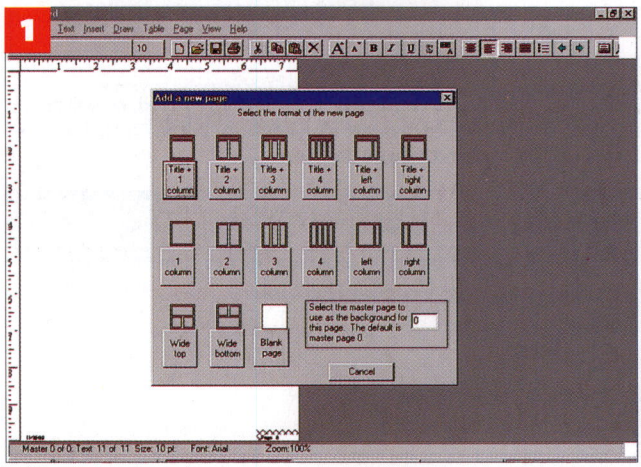
4 Click on the Straight Line button on the toolbar. Place a straight line next to the arrow. You'll need to change the point size in the Line and Fill palette to make it much thinner than the lines making up the arrow. Repeat as necessary until you have enough spaces for people to sign into. Place the lines accurately by looking at the X and Y measurements displayed at the bottom of the screen. Hey presto, we have a very simple document that only took a few minutes to create. By playing around with other features and changing the design, you can come up with much more eye-catching or subtle works, depending on your needs.

PUBLISH-IT

WHAT IT IS Publish-iT Version: 1.3
WHO MAKES IT Poster Software
SPECS 1MB, Windows 95, 98, 2000 or NT
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Shareware, $20 to register.
URL FOR DOWNLOAD
www.postersw.com

As with Envision, the key to working with Publish-iT is to learn to use the menu. And as before, this menu makes it easy by including a Question Mark button to explain the other functions. Publish-iT includes a number of templates and examples to work from. As you'd expect from a DTP package, it also has a spelling checker and a a set of drawing tools. You can add a number of different types of pictures to documents, importing BMP, GIF, JPEG, TIFF and metafiles. It also has simple picture editing features for bitmap images, such as cropping and rotating, as well as adjusting the brightness, contrast and colour.

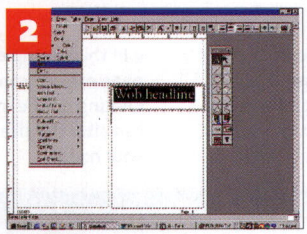
PUBLISH-IT MAKING A WOB

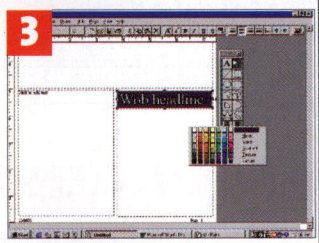


1 We're going to create a WOB, which stands for 'white on black' and is a way of making a headline stand out. First select New from the File menu, then choose a vertical or horizontal layout. Choose the Text button with the blue line around it on the tool bar and draw a box on the page. Clicking in the box allows you to type text into it.

2 Choose the Text Mode button on the tool bar (top left) to highlight the text. You can then change its properties by going to the Text menu and choosing options such as Size or Font. Next, Select Color and choose white on the palette.

3 Click on the arrow button on the tool bar (top right) and click in the text box so it is highlighted. Then click on the Fill Color button on the tool bar and select black on the palette. The WOB headline is effective, but use it sparingly.





...and if you'd paid the money

QUARKXPRESS
Apple Mac and Windows
£998.74 ***www.jungle.com***
Professional DTP package used extensively by magazines and newspapers.

ADOBE PAGEMAKER 6.5 PLUS
Apple Mac and Windows
£411.24 ***www.microwarehouse.co.uk***
The main rival to QuarkXPress, PageMaker includes hundreds of templates to get started quickly and is half the price.

EMAIL

Email programs have become much more sophisticated as the number of users has skyrocketed. Businesses still pay out a lot of money for high-end packages and these often bring together Web and corporate intranet access for that all-in-one feel. But there are also a number of high-quality free programs, and these usually include standard features such as address books and mailing lists.

OUTLOOK EXPRESS

WHAT IT IS Outlook Express
WHO MAKES IT Microsoft
SPECS 8.3MB with IE5, Windows 95/98/NT/2000
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Cut-down version
URL FOR DOWNLOAD
www.microsoft.com/downloads
URL FOR HELP/TIPS
search.support.microsoft.com/kb
This is a simple to use package for the home user, which is a fully functioning program, despite being a lower-end version of Outlook.

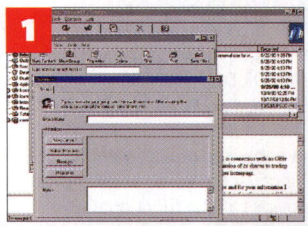
OUTLOOK EXPRESS GROUP EMAIL

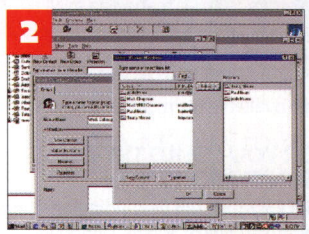
1 Here we're going to show you how to set up a group email so you can fire a message off to a bunch of friends or work colleagues quickly and easily. On the toolbar, click on Address Book followed by New Group. This leads you to a box that asks you to create your new group. Type in the name of the new group. In this case we'll call it 'Work Colleagues' to avoid confusion later on. Once that's done, click on Select Members and find the names of those you wish to include in the group. If you have a large list of contacts you may find it necessary to use the Find tool and search by name.

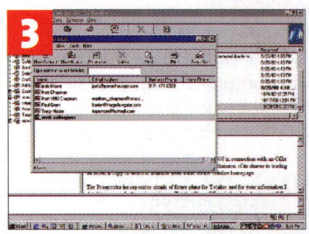
2 Once you have found the address you are looking for, click on Select to add it to the group list. To complete the group, simply repeat this process until you have included all those you want added to the list.

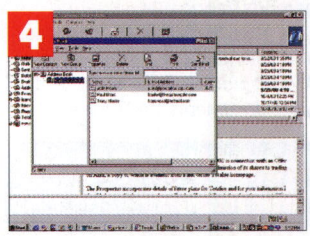
3 Once you've got all the names you need to click on OK. This will take you back a window. Click on OK again and you will see that the group email has been added to your address book.

4 Repeat this process to create as many different groups as you wish. If you find that you have created a lot of groups and it's becoming difficult to find the right one among all the other contacts, you can view the groups separately by clicking on Address Book, then View, then Group List. This gives you a drop-down menu of all your groups.









...and if you'd paid the money

OUTLOOK 2000 £90.47
www.dabs.com
The full version of Outlook usually comes installed on new PCs and has made a big dent in the market.

LOTUS NOTES £65.80
www.microwarehouse.co.uk
Lotus Notes is not only an email package, but also has an organiser, calendar, contact management and more.

WORD PROCESSORS

Word processors have moved on since the early packages that were nothing more than electronic typewriters. Packages now take all the pressure off, helping with spelling and grammar, and automating functions such as letter-writing.

CWORDPAD

WHAT IT IS CWordPad Version 3.0
WHO MAKES IT Cetus Software
SPECS 1.6 MB Windows 95/98/NT/2000
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Developed as freeware
URL FOR DOWNLOAD
download.cnet.com/downloads

An enhanced replacement for the Windows 95 WordPad, CWordPad provides all the functionality of WordPad, plus it features a spell-checker and a more complete help file. CWordPad comes with an English spelling lexicon, but others are available from Cetus Software.

OR YOU COULD TRY THESE

SUN STAROFFICE 5.2

SPECS 79-105MB depending on platform, Linux, Solaris, Windows 95/98/NT
www.sun.com/products/staroffice
Not just a word processor, but a fully-comprehensive office suite. It's free, but weighing in at 79-105MB it's a costly download.

ATLANTIS BY RISING SUN TECHNOLOGIES

SPECS 642KB, Windows 95/98/NT/2000
Beta pre-release, free to download.
download.cnet.com/downloads
A word processor that opens and saves documents in RTF format.

...and if you'd paid the money

MICROSOFT WORD 2000

£233.10 ***www.action.com***
The software giant's offering has become a standard package with the proliferation of Windows on PCs. Can be purchased separately but usually comes as part of MS Office.

LOTUS SMARTSUITE MILLENIUM EDITION V9.5

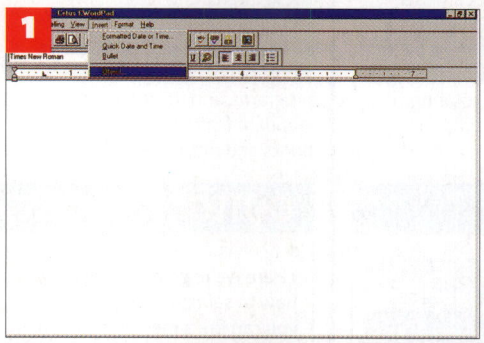
£394.80 ***www.jungle.com***
This office suite includes the Word Pro word processor, as well as all the regulars such as spreadsheets, organiser and contact manager.

CWORDPAD CREATE A LETTER AND LETTERHEAD

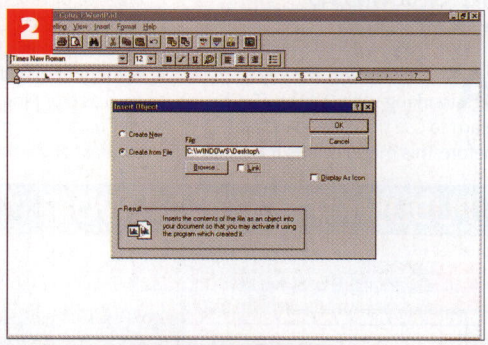
While CWordPad may not have the depth or templates of advanced word processing packages, it still offers a host of options that can add colour and flair to your documents.

Here we show you how you can embed objects such as images and other documents into your work.

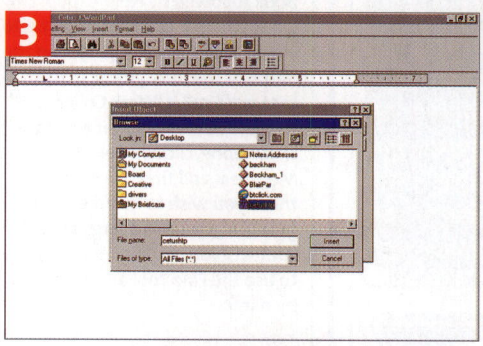
Say you want to start a letter with a company logo at the top. You can either create an object to insert from scratch or select an already stored image. This example uses an already created image, namely the Cetus Software logo.



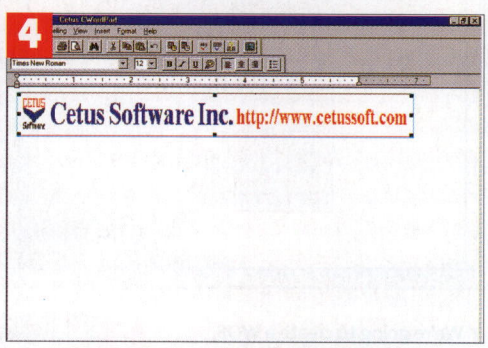
1 The procedure is quite straight forward. Firstly, click Insert on the toolbar and then click on Object in the list.



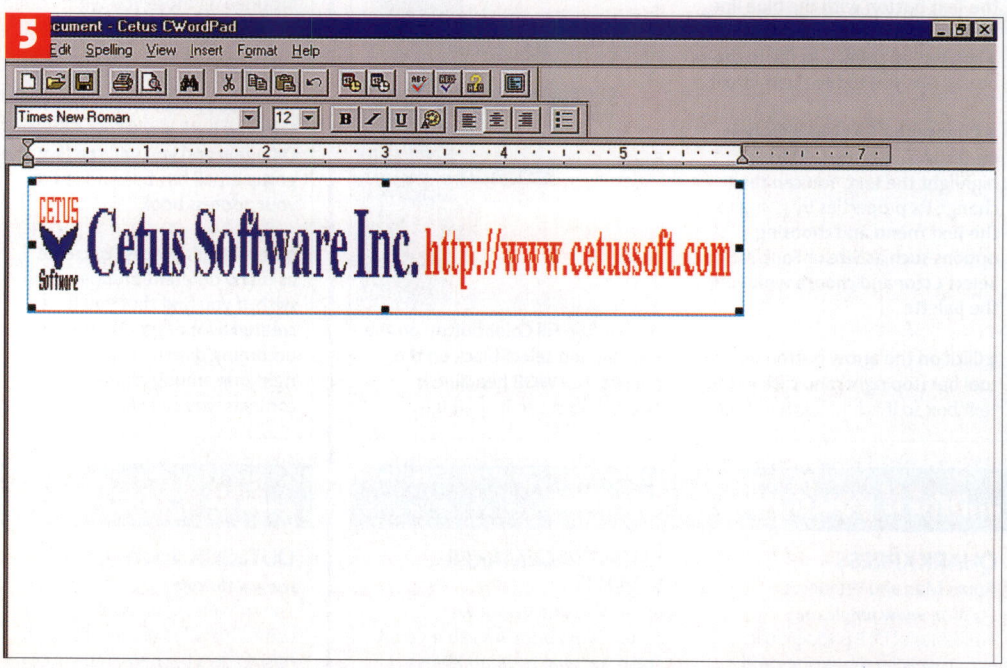
2 As we already have the image stored, we will not need to create a new one, so click on Create from File and then on Browse.



3 From here it's simply a case of finding the image you are looking for on your PC. In this example, the bitmap image we want is located on the desktop. Simply click on the desired image, then on Insert, followed by OK.



4 In this example, the image is too large to fit the page correctly and so its size needs to be changed. Clicking on the image object reveals eight dots that can alter the size and shape of the image to suit your needs.



5 Click and hold the dot on the bottom right of the image and move it so that it fits within the confines of the page. Releasing the mouse button redraws the image to fit the size of the object. Continue altering the size by repeating the process until it looks just right.

SPREADSHEETS

Spreadsheets used to be the preserve of the accounts department and the rest of the world was happy to leave them to it. But after they were included in mainstream office programs, it wasn't long before the general public realised they were useful for everything from simple shopping lists to doing the year's accounts.

There are now a number of free programs that range from the very simple to the professional. There are still a good number of high-end, paid-for programs designed for businesses, as companies still don't seem to trust something they can download free on the Net.

SIMPLE SPREADSHEET

WHAT IT IS Simple SpreadSheet
WHO MAKES IT Alan Conroy
SPECS 240KB, Windows 95/98/NT/2000
COST Free to download
WHY IT'S FREE Developed as freeware
URL FOR DOWNLOAD
www.zdnet.com/downloads

Simple SpreadSheet describes this product perfectly; a very simple version of the kinds of spreadsheets you would expect to find in professional packages. There are no easy shortcuts for creating databases and calculations, but at a price of absolutely nothing, it is worth persisting with.

OR YOU COULD TRY THIS AS-EASY-AS VERSION 1.6 BY TRIUS

SPECS: 1.3 MB, Windows 95/98/NT/2000
Shareware, $59 to register.
www.triusinc.com
A powerful 32-bit program with more than 130 mathematical, financial, scientific, statistical, string, date and time functions. Supports spreadsheets up to 8,192 rows by 256 columns, and can create graphs.

...and if you'd paid the money

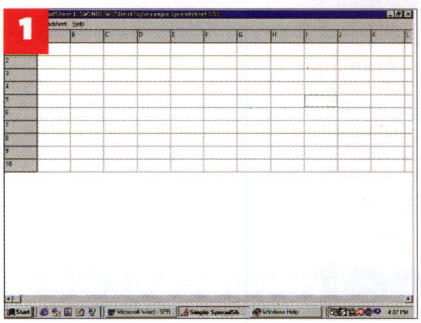
MICROSOFT EXCEL 2001

£264.37 ***www.dabs.com***
Usually found as part of the Office suite of products, this spreadsheet program has become widely used by professionals and amateurs alike.

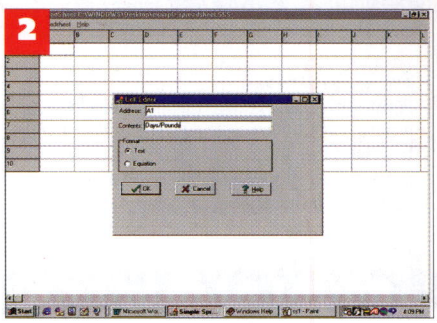
LOTUS 1-2-3 MILLENNIUM EDITION

£104.74 ***www.jungle.com***
Lotus 1-2-3 allows you to work with large documents using more than 645,000 rows. It comes with a headset for voice control, allowing you to enter and format data.

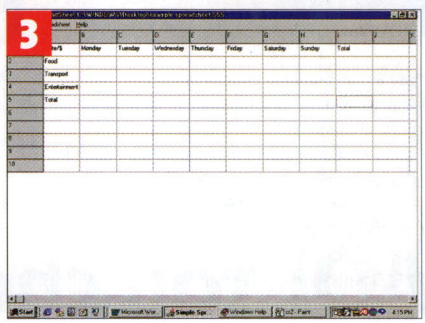
SIMPLE SPREADSHEET CALCULATE YOUR WEEKLY EXPENSES



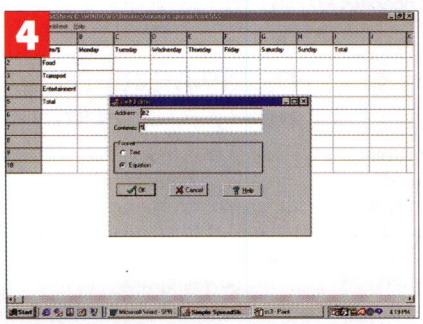
1 Here we'll show you how to create a simple weekly expense account. You are initially presented with a simple grid spanning A to Z along the columns and 1 to 10 down the rows. These can be expanded easily for larger spreadsheets but for this example it is unnecessary.



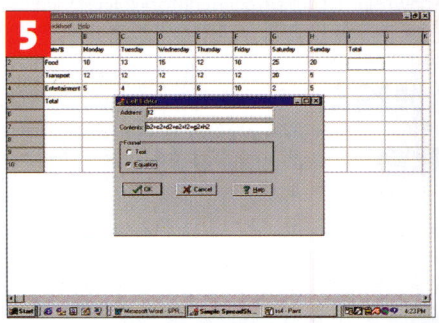
2 To start with, we need to enter what the columns and rows will represent. Clicking on cell A1 will bring up a cell editor box. In this box we enter what the columns will represent, in this case days of the week and pounds sterling. You will notice that there is an option to select text or equation. As the default is text, there is no need to change this yet. Press OK to enter the text into the cell.



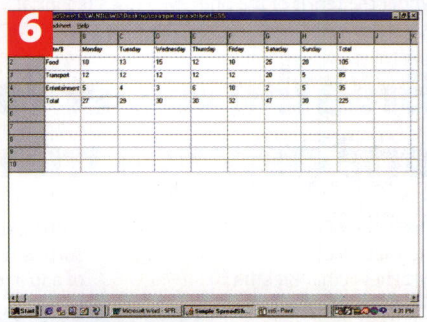
3 Continue by filling in the cells in the first row with the days of the week, followed by a total cell, all in text style. Down the first column, fill in your various expenses. In this case we have used food, travel and entertainment, followed by another total box.



4 It is now time to start filling in your numbers. Start with box B2 by clicking on the cell and filling in your how much you think your food bill for a Monday will be. Although this is not yet an equation, the number will be used for calculating later, so click on Equation.



5 Fill in the rest of these cells for Monday to Friday for all your expenses in the same way. It is now time to start making your calculations. Click on cell I2 and on Equation. To make the calculation type 'b2+c2+d2+e2+f2+g2+h2' then click on OK. This will make the addition calculation for food for the week. Do the same for each type of expense.

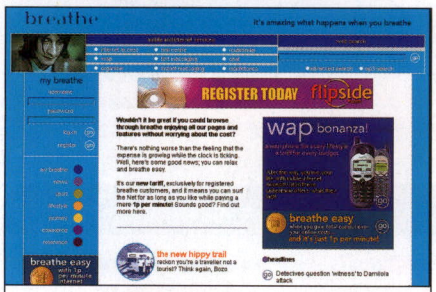


6 Do the same in each column to find out your total expense for each day. Click on cell B5, select Equation and type 'b2+b3+b4' followed by OK. Do the same for every day of the week, but this time also calculate the Total column. This will give you the complete cost for the week. From here costs can then be altered as you wish, but be careful as the Totals cells will not automatically recalculate when changes are made. To get the correct total following an alteration, click on Spreadsheet in the toolbar and then Calculate. This will now give you the right amount.

ISP news

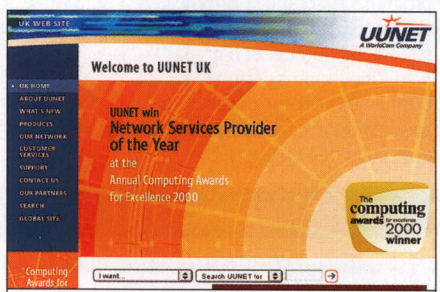
Breathe for 1p a min > ntl halves cable cost > BT says 'sorry'...

THIS MONTH'S TOP ISPs



EVENING & WEEKEND SURFERS
BREATHE *www.breathe.co.uk*
Founded back in 1997, Breathe is a well-established ISP that has always boasted service quality as a strong point; judging by this showing, we can only predict that this will continue long into the future.

HEAVY HOME USERS
AOL *www.aol.co.uk*
Perhaps the best-known ISP in the world, AOL is aimed at the family. They've recently moved to a fixed-rate Internet call package, making it more suitable for peak-time usage. Features a 50-hour toll-free try-out.



BUSINESS USERS
UUNET *www.uk.uu.net*
One of the longest-surviving UK Internet companies, UUNET was recently voted Network Services Provider of the Year 2000. As well as a number of business-class services, UUNET provides backbone services to ISPs.

AOL top choice for Internet addicts

America Online's newly-introduced flat rate Internet package, coupled with a powerful showing in our latest lab test results, has led to it taking the honours as this month's ISP of choice for heavy, peak-time Internet users.

The package involves a 50-hour free trial followed by a fixed £14.99 a month fee – you pay not a penny more to browse to your heart's content, even if you stay online all day and all night. Under the terms of the offer, even AOL's technical helpline comes free of charge, making it one of only eight of our Top 50 ISPs to do so.

Meanwhile, 'evenings and weekends' surfers should sign up with Breathe (***www.breathe.co.uk***). The company's new 1p per minute tariff (see our news story below), coupled with a strong lab test showing, meant that it saw off the likes of Luna Internet and TinyOnline (see our Top 50 ISPs over the page) to take the number one slot. The only downside is the 50p per minute helpline charge.

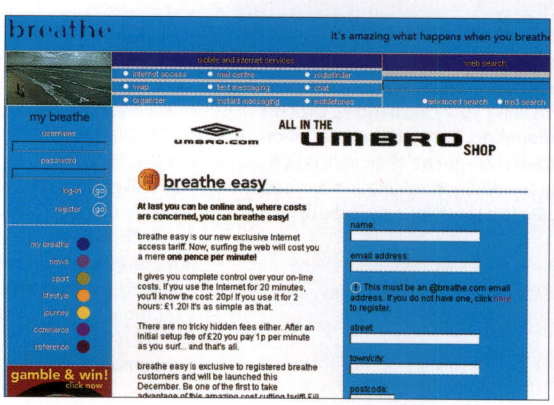
Targeting the UK boom in small firms discovering the potential of the Internet, UUNet is this month's choice of Small Business/Specialist ISPs. Aside from the obligatory powerful showing in the labs, UUNet (***www.uk.uu.net***) also boasts a range of services designed to offer businesses a complete solution, from basic dial-up single connections to 155Mbps leased lines, plus Web hosting to Web design services. Helpline support operates 24/7 and is charged at local rates.

Breathe easier for just one penny a minute

The world of penny-a-minute Internet access has just expanded with news that Breathe (***www.breathe.com***) has added a low-tariff option to its service options.

The new Breathe service involves a one-off 'set up' fee of £20, after which you simply pay one penny for every minute that you're connected to the Internet.

The offer puts the ISP into the same arena as OneTel.net, which also offers 1p access that's 64K ISDN compatible (a must for Home Highway users), with no set-up charges. Others, such as AOL, now offer the option of a 1p a minute service, but this is accompanied by a regular £9.99 per month subscription fee.



As with many rival service providers, Breathe is quick to point out that it will offer unmetered access as soon as possible in 2001. Late last year, British Telecom took a hefty rap on the knuckles from industry watchdog OFTEL, after many ISPs had been forced to withdraw their new unmetered charges.

The ISPs blamed BT, claiming that the charges handed out by the telecoms giant coupled with the huge demands for the unmetered services made them unworkable. BT now has until February to launch a new charging model that will enable a greater spread in unmetered services in the UK.

Lightning connector now £20 a month

Forget 64/128kbps ISDN lines; three million UK homes are being given the chance to blast around the Internet at speeds of up to 512kbps, and all for just £19.99 a month.

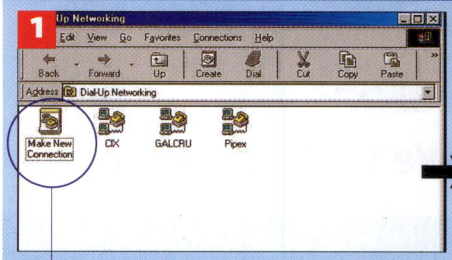
The new offer comes from the UK's largest cable operator, ntl, and of course comes with a catch; you have to be an existing subscriber to its cable modem service (hence the three million homes).

But for those already taking ntl cable, the new offer will be tempting. The price undercuts the £40 per month typically being asked for ADSL installation. And like ADSL, it doesn't tie up your normal telephone line (the modem uses the same cable that handles the subscriber's cable TV service).

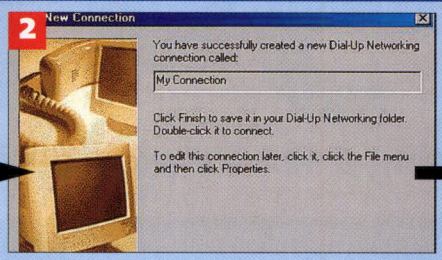
Non-subscribers can press their faces to the glass at ***www.ntl.co.uk***.

How to switch ISPs in seconds

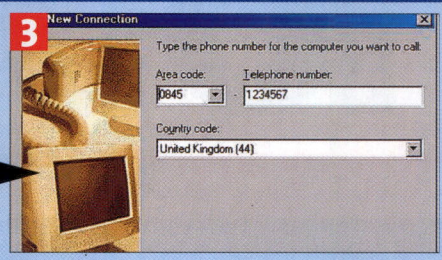
Unreliable connection? Why be at the mercy of one ISP, when you can try many in moments?



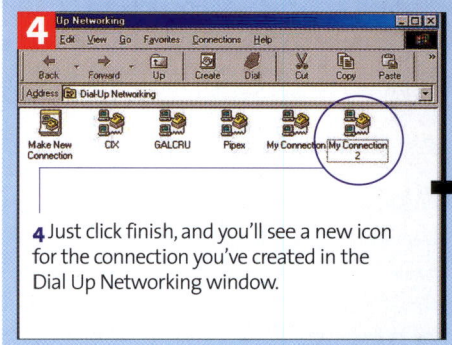
1 To make your new connection, go Start > Programs > Accessories > Communications > Dial Up Networking. Then just click the 'make new connection' icon.



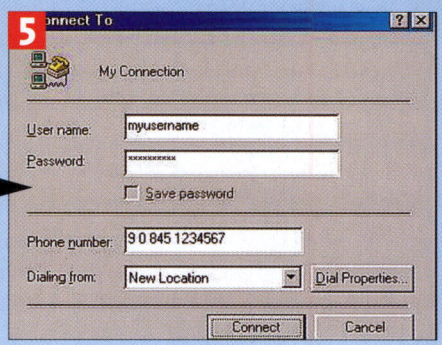
2 Start by typing in your intended ISP's name (your PC should automatically choose your modem), then click Next.



3 Now type in the new ISP's telephone number (you'll get this just by calling them and asking) and make sure you choose the correct country to show where you're dialling from.



4 Just click finish, and you'll see a new icon for the connection you've created in the Dial Up Networking window.

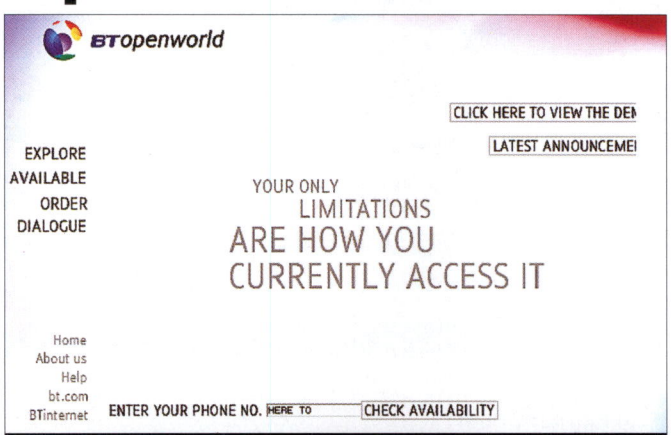


5 Double-click the new icon to access the window into which you should input the username and password supplied by the new ISP. Hit 'connect', and dialling should begin...

TOP TIP

Copy the new connections onto your desktop. That way, when one ISP won't connect, you can simply switch to another one in seconds, rather than having to navigate all the way back to the Dial Up Networking window.

BT says sorry for slowing superfast Internet access



BT Openworld: 'We're sorry that the installations have taken so long'

British Telecom has publicly apologised to UK Internet users still waiting for installation of its super-fast ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) connection.

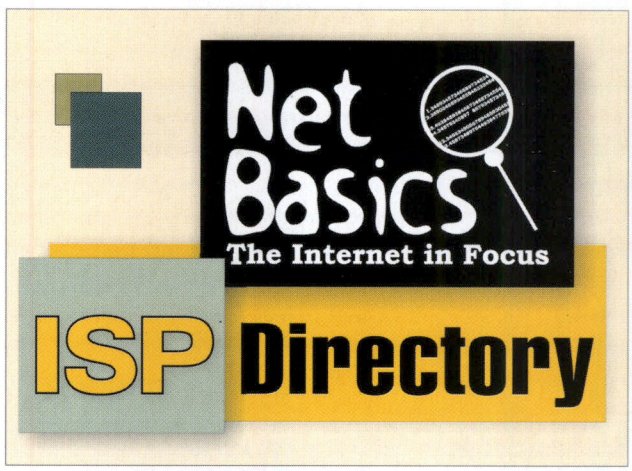
The service, which involves a one-off installation fee followed by a monthly subscription, offers permanent connection to the Net at speeds of up to 10Mbps – lightning compared to the snail's pace offered by home-use 56.6K modems.

Since the announcement of the service, however, BT has been dogged by complaints of long waits for installation and poor service.

Says a BT Openworld spokesman: 'We're sorry that installations have taken longer than expected. We apologise to prospective customers for the inconvenience. The high demand coupled with teething problems in increasing the supply of ADSL lines has meant that our installation rate has not increased as fast as we would have liked.'

BT claims that it will treble the rate of installations in the coming months, and is looking to quadruple the number of staff on the Openworld help desks.

www.btopenworld.com



Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

The ISP Directory features over 100 key facts and pricing information for nearly 200 UK ISPs including every industry leader.

For further info, visit:
www.netbasics.com

Net Basics™ The Internet in Focus

NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
info@netbasics.com
Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

Top 50 ISPs

February 2001 Choosing a service provider? We've made it easy...

ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	PHONE	EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends				
Breathe	**www.breathe.co.uk**	Well-established free ISP. Easy to use site design	0800 500150	5
Luna Internet	**www.luna.co.uk**	Small, customer-focused company	01782 855 655	Unlimited
Tiny Online	**www.tinyonline.net**	Allows users to keep track of how they have been online to date	0900 290 9103	5
F9 Free	**www.f9.net.uk**	Free ISP from previously subscription-only service Force 9	0800 0737800	Unlimited
Smartone	**www.smartone.co.uk**	Content-based service offering free dial-ups	08700 774411	1 Unified
Surf & Save (Powergen)	**www.pgen.net**	Every minute online gets a discount on Powergen power bills	0900 2909158	Unlimited
Netcom	**www.netcom.co.uk**	*Which?* magazine recommended 'Best Buy'	01603 444444	Unlimited
Timewarp Internet	**www.timewarp.co.uk**	Friendly, knowledgeable team giving a professional service	0161 950 8855	Unlimited
Nildram	**www.nildram.net**	Excellent customer service and support	01296 319103	Unlimited
Screaming.net	**www.screaming.net**	The pioneer of the free access and free phonecall model	Undisclosed	Unlimited
UK Online Ltd	**www.ukonline.co.uk**	Family-friendly ISP with plenty of shareware and gaming software	01749 333333	1
Free Internet	**www.free-internet.co.uk**	Free access, free mail and Web space	0900 9801666	1
AdeptWeb Ltd	**www.adept.co.uk**	Well-established company with years of experience	01843 850444	Unlimited
Free Online	**www.free-online.net**	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email	0870 7060504	5
Gateway 2000	**www.ukgateway.net**	Packaged with Gateway computers	0906 5544400	Unlimited
The X-Stream Network	**www.x-stream.com**	Services include 0800 offers and voice/fax accesable email	0870 7306466	1 with unified messaging fac
Sniff Out	**www.sniffout.net**	Well-developed range of UK-specific content	0845 4582356	Unlimited
Freeserve	**www.freeserve.net**	Free provider from the Dixons Group	0990 500049	Unlimited
This is it!	**www.thisisit.co.uk**	End-user targeted free ISP	0906 9124000	Unlimited
NewNet Limited	**www.newnet.co.uk**	Five years of experience in the industry	0845 355 44 55	Unlimited
FREENET	**www.freenet.co.uk**	Free access with a gaming bias	01329 828282	Unlimited
CALLNET	**www.callnetuk.com**	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced Web-based services	0171 3358300	5
Freewire	**www.freewire.net**	Dial in on 0845 088 0088 with any username and password	0906 7160550	Unlimited
FDD Ltd	**www.fdd.co.uk**	Very high levels of customer service	01865 321003	Unlimited
Go Free	**www.gofree.co.uk**	Free ISP offering online signup, complete with helpline	0906 6903313	Unlimited
Dabsol	**www.dabsol.net**	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features	0890 9940000	Unlimited
Virgin Net	**www.virgin.net**	Longstanding ISP now offering a stylish free service	0500 558800	5
UKIP (Internet Consultants) Ltd	**www.ukip.co.uk**	Providing Internet access and Web solutions since 1995	01772 908000	Unlimited
Freeway	**www.freewayuk.com**	Free access, free mail and Web space	0906 6903319	Unlimited
OrbitalNet	**www.orbitalnet.co.uk**	Range of account options to suit any needs	01233 646505	5
Free to You	**www.free2you.co.uk**	No-frills free ISP with online sign-up	Undisclosed	Unlimited
Eisdosnet	**www.eidosnet.co.uk**	Brought to you by Eidos, publishers of *Tomb Raider*	0906 3263366	Unlimited
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing				
AOL	**www.aol.co.uk**	A large ISP offering proprietry software	0800 3765432	5
London Web Comms Ltd	**www.londonweb.net**	London-based ISP offering connection and Web design	0181 3494500	3
Aviators Network	**www.aviators.net**	Aircraft-related content for the pilot and the enthusiast	0700 2842867	1
Paradise Internet	**www.pins.co.uk**	Subscription provider which also authors software	01256 414863	1
CIX	**www.cix.co.uk**	Top-rated ISP for March, June and July 2000	0845 3555050	Unlimited
Compuserve	**www.compuserve.com**	Initial free unlimited access for first month	0990 000200	5
Which? Online	**www.which.net**	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine	0645 830240	1
BT Internet	**www.btinternet.com**	Another Internet arm of BT offering a full access package	0800 800001	Unlimited
ClaraNET Ltd	**www.clara.net**	Subscription-based ISP with a range of account options	0800 3582828	Unlimited
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses				
UUNet	**www.uk.uu.net**	Business-focused ISP	01223 250122	Unlimited
Firstnet Services Ltd	**www.firstnet.co.uk**	Business solution provider	0113 2944224	5
Netcom	**www.netcom.net.uk**	Comprehensive range of services to the home and business user	0800 9809107	20
Internet in Nottingham Ltd	**www.innotts.co.uk**	Commercial packages tailored to its customers	0115 956 2222	Unlimited
Direct Connection	**www.dircon.net**	Home and business ISP offering global roaming	0800 0720000	Unlimited
UVNET	**www.uv.net**	Will help other companies to become ISPs	01753 776699	Unlimited
CYBERphile Internet	**www.cyberphile.co.uk**	Business-oriented, Midlands-based provider	01543 454840	1
AngliaNet Limited	**www.anglianet.co.uk**	Dial-up, Web hosting and design for home and business users	01473 211922	1
Charis Internet Services	**www.charis.co.uk**	Customer support claimed to be 'of the highest importance'	0121 2485800	Unlimited

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

what service provider?

You want to be sure that your Net connection will be there when you need it – and that you're getting value for money. Which is why we test the country's best ISPs for reliability and speed of connection, and then award stars based on their performance in three areas.

Variation in modem speed Measures whether you get a constant speed once a modem connects. ISPs should offer a constant speed and we measure any variation. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses position the greater the variance in connection. This is achieved by comparison so that no ISP is favoured above others.

Variation in time to connect Measures the variation time taken to get connected. The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, either through the engaged tone, or if it does not respond correctly to modem signals. The results are combined into a single reading giving us a fair way to chart ISPs based on aspects of their dial-in service.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you is correct. The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme should contact eval@netbasics.com. For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

CONTENT	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE	MONTHLY CHARGE	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS	VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Local	8-9	★★★★★
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Local	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	National	7-11, 7 Days	★★★★★
Many links of general interest	Yes	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Metered	9-6 Mon-Sat 10-5 Sun	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, X2	£0.00	£0.00	National	Office hours	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Metered	9-7	★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	Local	24hr Emergency	★★★★
Travel, business, entertainment, sport	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★
Newsgroups and IE5 download	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Metered	24/7	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Local	8:30-6	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	Premium Rate	24/7	★★★★
None	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Free	8-10	★★★★
Chat, news, shopping, personal finance...	No	K56flex	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	National	24/7	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★
None	No	K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	£1 per minute/via email	24/7	★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Local	9-10	★★★
Games links	Yes	K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	National rates	9-6 (10-5 Sun)	★★★
Chat servers, channels, services, news, Web mail	Yes	K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	Free	24/7	★★★
None	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Free	9-5.30	★★★
None	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Metered	24/7	★★★
None	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	49p per minute	8-6 M-F	★★
News, Web TV and radio	Yes	X2	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	National	8-6	★★
News, sport, weather, shopping	No	K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute/online	24/7	★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	£0.00	£0.00	Local	Business hours	★★
Search engine page and technical support	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	Tel support soon	n/a	★★
Free access to the Mplayer games network	No	V.90	£0.00	£0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★
Content from chat to holidays	Yes	V.90	£0.00	£14.99	Free	8-10.30 M-F 9-9.30 Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	£17.63	£14.68	Standard	9-9 M-Sat	★★★★★
Flight planning and navigation	No	K56Flex	£0.00	£11.75	Standard	9-9 7 days	★★★★★
None	Yes	X2	£17.63	£9.40	Metered	11-7 M-F	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	£0.00	£17.61	Local	8-10 M-F, 11-6 SS	★★
A large range of channels	No	V.90	£0.00	£16.95	National	8-12 midnight 7 days	★★
Online shopping with consumer protection	Yes	K56Flex	£11.75	£14.75	Free	24/7	★★
None	Yes	V.90	£0.00	£11.75	Local	24/7	★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£8.99	Free	24/7	★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Local	24/7	★★★★★
Search engines and support	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£12.50	Local	Business hours	★★★★★
Comprehensive technical support	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	£0.00	£14.95	National	24/7	★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Local	24	★★★★
User zone containing handy member services	Yes	K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£13.50	Local	9-9 seven days	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Free	24	★★★
None	Yes	33.6	£0.00	£11.74	Standard	8.30-6.00 M-F	★★★
None	Yes	33.6	£0.00	£11.75	Mobile	9-5 M-F, Sun 12-6	★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	£0.00	£0.00	Free	8-7	★★

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

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Online chat

Tired of the same old discussions, or have a problem you'd like to share? It's easy to meet new people with online chat

What is online chat?

Online chat lets you communicate with others – often in real time. In other words, you type in comments, send them over the Net and they're seen almost immediately. And you're only paying for a local phone call – even if the person you are 'talking' to happens to be on the other side of the world.

What does it let me do?

- 'Chat' with friends and relatives in other countries without running up massive phone bills.
- Join in an online discussion with an expert on your favourite subject.
- Ask a celebrity questions during a moderated 'conference'.
- Talk randomly to people on the other side of the world.

DON'T PULL THAT FACE ROUND HERE!

'Smileys' are a way of including some indication of emotion in your messages. They are useful when, for example, you are making a joke and you want to be sure that the person at the other end of the line realises you're not serious. Hang a relevant smiley on the end of your sentence by typing in the relevant characters – but do try not to over-use these things. To 'read' them, just turn the page 90 degrees to the left ;-) OK? Here are the four most used smileys:

- :-) The original smiley. Indicates a joke, or just a happy person!
- ;-) Wink
- :-o Shock (an open mouth)
- :-(Unhappy

BEGINNER'S TIP

Don't register your details unless you really want to

Often chat software will ask you for your name, and sometimes other info. Be wary about giving this; you don't know what they'll be used for.

INTERMEDIATE TIP

Be careful out there

If you are looking for romance online, be careful. As you would with press ads, let someone know where you're going if you meet up.

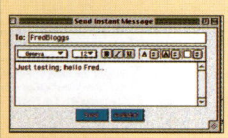
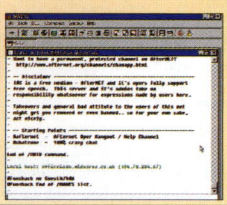
ADVANCED TIP

Go one step further

If text chat seems a bit flat, try 3D chat, where users take on a 'persona' and actually walk round chat rooms. Try ***www.thepalace.com*** for starters.

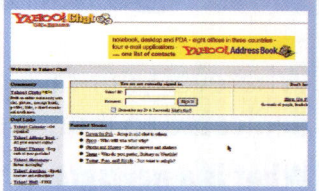
What kinds of Internet chat can I try?

There are several programs and methods for chatting online. It can get a bit confusing, so let's look at the main options

TYPE OF CHAT		FOR & AGAINST	CHAT LINK
LIVE ON A WEB SITE This kind of chat takes place within the window of your browser on a Web site. Everything you type in can immediately be seen by the other people viewing the Web page – and everything anyone else types in can be seen by you.		**FOR** Easy to use; no extra software required to run it. **AGAINST** Works on someone's Web site, so the subject will be dictated by them and private chat is unlikely.	***www.talkcity.com*** Online community where you can talk on various subjects, including romance and current affairs.
MODERATED SESSIONS Moderated chats are 'supervised' by a chat room host. In other words, you type in your message and a person sitting at the other end of the line decides whether or not to allow your comments or questions to be displayed. This is the norm for celebrity chats.		**FOR** Discussions are sensibly run. Plonkers may be screened out. **AGAINST** Only takes place at certain times because they require a moderator to be present on the site. Censorship...	***www.chat.beeb.com*** The BBC's celebrity chat service with daily visits from the network's top stars.
REAL-TIME USING EXTRA SOFTWARE Software such as AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ allow you to chat with other people in real time – either a group of people together, or one-on-one. You don't use a Web browser; dedicated software takes care of everything for you.		**FOR** Instant response; you can chat privately to one person. **AGAINST** Requires extra software; some firms don't allow this to be installed on their PCs, so you may not be able to chat at work.	***www.aol.co.uk/aim*** ***www.icq.com*** Chat one-to-one with your friends in real time on the Net. AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ software are two of the most popular.
IRC This is Internet Relay Chat. It's a way of talking to many people at once using special software. IRC software can be a pain to use, however – it was, after all, modelled on Citizens' Band radio.		**FOR** Useful, technical chats are often held on IRC channels. **AGAINST** Software is difficult to use; IRC users can be impatient with newcomers.	***www.mirc.com*** Although it can be tricky to get used to, mIRC is the best software for IRC chat. ***www.ircle.com*** IRC client for Macs.

CHAT ROOMS

Engage in a gabfest about some of the subject's covered in this month's *thenet* magazine...

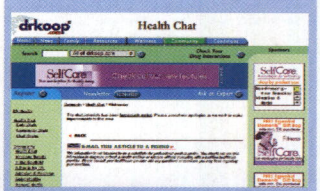


uk.chat.yahoo.com
Chat about anything that takes your fancy in Yahoo's chat rooms

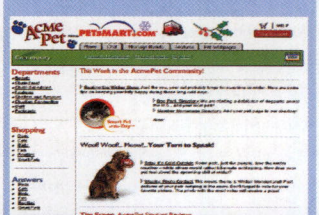
www.loquax.com
Lottery fanatics can talk about their latest win or get tips here

www.corrie.net
What do Corrie addicts do when the show's over? Discuss it online!

www.talkcity.com/santasworkshop/chat/ If you're surrounded by Scrooges, find new mates here



www.drkoop.com/community/chat
A place to natter about your nasty, post-festivities stomach-ache



acmepet.petsmart.com/
Discuss your doggie's diet with other canine-loving chatterers

MORE EMAIL HELP AND ADVICE @ www.thenetnow.co.uk

- ★ Sending your first message
- ★ Newsgroup etiquette
- ★ Members-only bulletin boards
- ★ Web forums

Newsgroups

Whatever your fave rave, they'll be a newsgroup dedicated to it on the Net. Here's how to join it

What is a newsgroup?

Newsgroups are one of the older services on the Internet. Each group is like a bulletin board – anyone can post messages to different newsgroups, and anyone can read the postings. There are tens of thousands of different newsgroup subjects available, so there will be one that matches your interests – whether you're looking for info on beekeeping or book-keeping, computers or comics, sewing or sailing.

Why should I use newsgroups?

Although the Web has plenty of information on most subjects, newsgroups will often have more detailed answers to questions. If you have a specific question on a subject, you can have half a dozen responses in two hours.

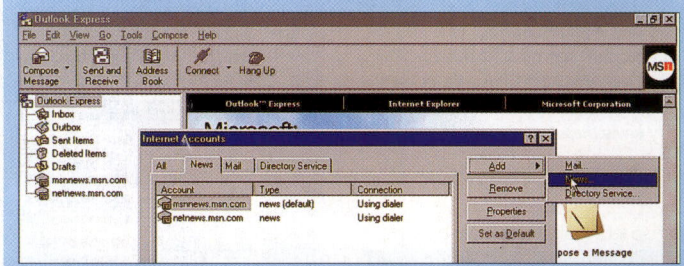
BEGINNER'S TIP

If you don't want to go to the bother of configuring Outlook Express or other newsgroup access software, visit DejaNews **www.deja.com** – a Web-based interface to newsgroups. You can read and send messages from here, all via your Web browser. Simple.

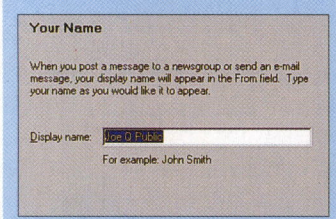
ADVANCED TIP

Your ISP will provide you with its own news server access. Mick's Place at ***web.ukonline.co.uk/mick.sz/*** has over 50 free access news server addresses. To add more servers to Outlook Express, go through the setting up steps outlined below.

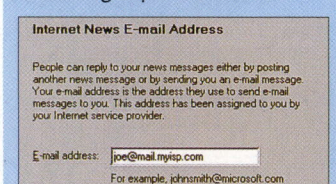
Accessing newsgroups using Outlook Express



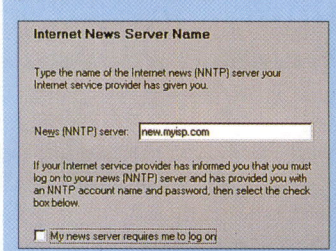
1 Go to the Accounts entry in the Tools menu, click on the News tab to list your current news accounts (if any), hit Add and choose News.



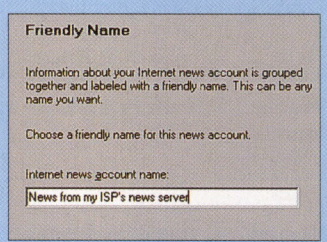
2 Type in your name. This will be displayed in any message you post to a newsgroup. Then hit Next.



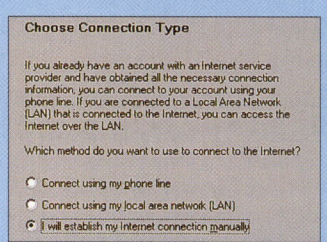
3 Type in your email address. This will be displayed in any message you post. Then click Next.



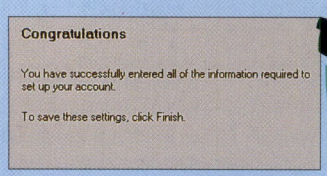
4 Enter the name of your ISP's server which should be given in your user documentation.



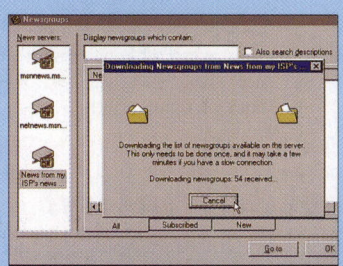
5 Give the news server a name that makes sense to you.



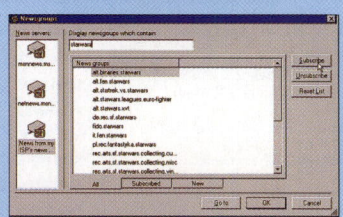
6 Tell Outlook Express that you will dial your ISP manually before you start reading news.



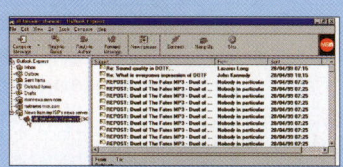
7 And you're done! You have now set up a newsgroup access account. Now let's see how to use it.



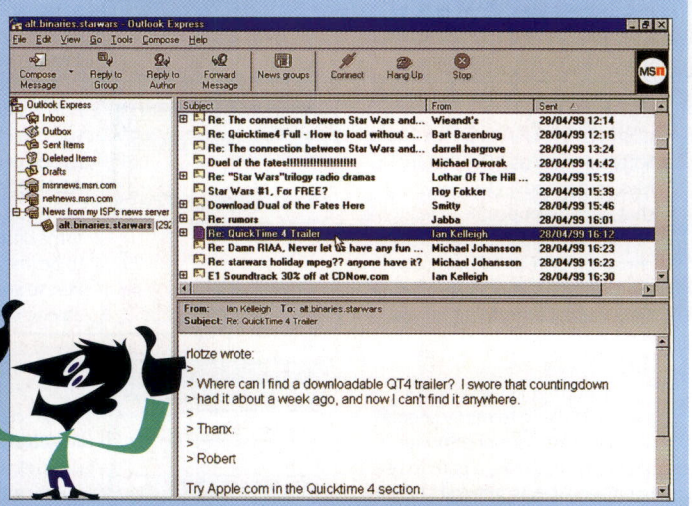
8 After hitting Close, you're asked if you want to download your ISP's list of newsgroups. When you click Yes, the list will be downloaded – so make sure you're online. This can take up to 10 minutes when you first connect to your news server because you are downloading the names of thousands of newsgroups.



9 Once all the newsgroups are downloaded, you can explore. If you want to find *Star Wars* postings, for example, type 'starwars' into the text field at the top of the window to display all newsgroups containing that word. You can subscribe to as many groups as you want.



10 To access a message inside a newsgroup, click on the subject header to read a summary. Double click the header and the whole message downloads, appearing on the lower half of the screen.



11 If there is a '+' sign by the message header this means there are replies to this message which you can also read. Click on the '+' sign to list the replies.

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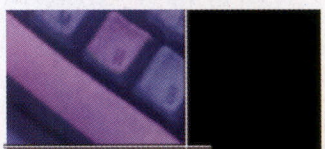

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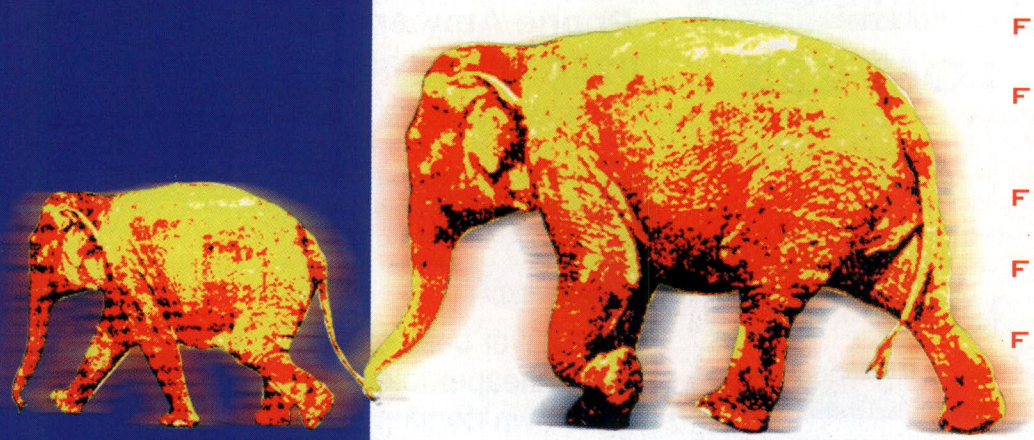

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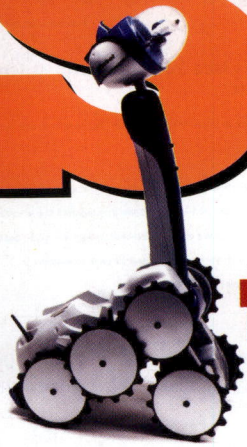

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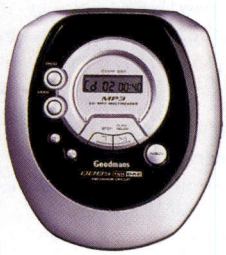

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JOHN BIRD

The man behind *The Big Issue* has taken to the Net in a big way with his new venture

You're famous for founding *The Big Issue*, but tell us about your new project, ABC Tales.
It's a Web site, a magazine and will soon be a series of books. The first issue of the magazine was published last month, featuring original fiction both from celebrities and unknown writers. What the ABC Tales site does is create an alphabetical grid for people to upload their bite-size fiction. We're putting out 30,000 copies of the magazine at tube and mainline stations, starting in London. It'll be free. We hope to get circulation up to 100,000 a month.

All the stories on the Web site cost nothing to download. How do you hope to break even?
Advertising, sponsorship, Web affiliate schemes, and we'll offer stories to radio companies. The writers only get paid if their stories make it into the weekly online magazine or the monthly print version. Twenty percent of any profits will go to *The Big Issue*. That's what I do now: develop businesses to feed income into the *Issue* and create jobs to take people off the streets. The 'digital divide' can be overcome by access in libraries, colleges and Job Centres. If people can get online for free, they can learn skills, and it doesn't matter what they look like, when they work or where they are. You have to skill people away from poverty. I've never met a homeless person who's refused the chance of getting onto the Net.

The *Issue* has spread across the world. Will ABC Tales do the same?
We're already getting stories from around the world, and there are plans for German, French, Italian and Spanish versions. And look out for our 'Talecatchers', who'll go to schools, offices and clubs with a microphone, record stories then put them online in audio format. We've all got stories in us, but only two per cent of us ever write them down.

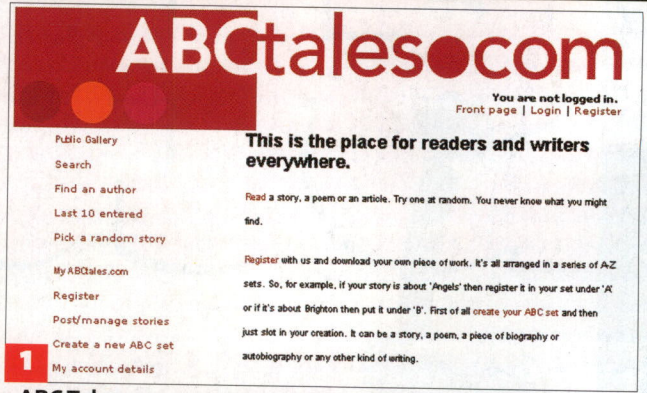
So do you think the Web will mean the end of 'dead tree' publishing?
It'll limit the reasons for cutting trees down, and that's a good thing. There's lots of information we don't need permanently on the shelf. That's one of the beauties of the Net, it frees up resources.

You're old friends with The Body Shop's Anita Roddick. Does she always send you soap and shampoo at Christmas?
Anita's writing something for us and her husband is one of our backers. I knew them when they didn't have a pot to piss in. And no, they always get me something very practical at Christmas, like a Swiss Army knife.

Finally, what's the most you've ever paid for a copy of the *Issue*?
I don't need to buy it. But I often take the vendors for a cup of tea.

WORDS: MATTHEW BINGHAM; PICTURE: BIG ISSUE

JOHN'S PIC OF THE WEB



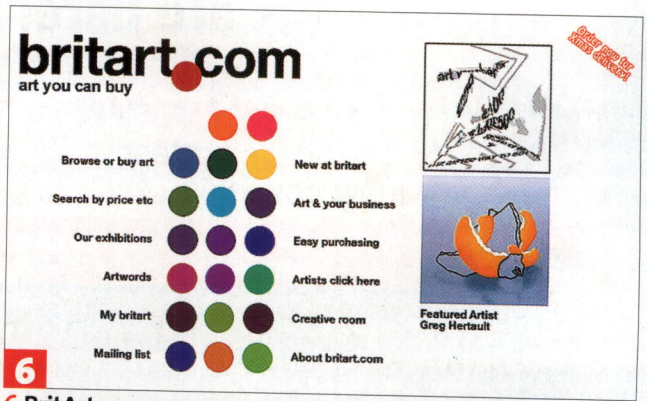
1 ABC Tales *www.abctales.com*
I've got stories on there, as have my friends. I might go on to write under names like April Jones, Admiral Dunturdy... I think that would be fun.

2 The Hunger Site
www.thehungersite.com
This is interesting, because it's about turning a virtual community into a body of people doing good in the world. Logging on is the best way to start the day.

3 Lonely Planet
www.lonelyplanet.co.uk
It's so refreshing to read the way they see the world – it's effectively a shrine to ethical tourism. I do think they use too much orange in their pages, though.

4 UpMyStreet
www.upmystreet.co.uk
I love the idea of a site that gives you information on your area. We need more of that; it's the Web at its most powerful. It cuts down phone calls, travel. It unravels the Web spaghetti.

5 The Onion
www.theonion.com
I used to read this in the States – I lived there for two years – so I'm pleased there's now a Web site.



6 BritArt *www.britart.co.uk*
This site is all about getting creative people into the marketplace – young artists who have yet to make the break. It's what the Web should be doing.

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